STRAIGHT CROOKS

HOWARD FIELDING

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A Detective Story

By

HOWARD FIELDING

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

THERE exists in the city of New York a temple to Adventure—or shall we say a factory—an establishment wherein unusual and startling experiences are made, as if by machinery designedly installed for that special purpose. Its corporate name is the Practical Scientific Reform Association, but it is more often designated, in one way or another, by the name of its founder, Woodbury Newcomb, the world's most famous criminologist. Wide publicity has attended it from its birth, but news cannot reach everybody, and therefore the facts would better be stated here by way of introduction to the Burgoyne affair, in which the association was so strangely and so dangerously involved.

The reform of deserving convicts was the ostensible object of the institution, and its principal officers, under Newcomb, were three supposedly reformed men whom he had encountered in one of his innumerable adventures. They had been notorious and picturesque criminals, but Newcomb made of them "the corner stone and pillars of the association"—as he phrased it in a public address.

Whatever these men were, or had been, they were *interesting.* Their advertising value was immense. By means of it, and of his own high reputation and

peculiar talents, Newcomb won powerful support and ample funds, at the very outset. He made criminology a fad in the topmost stratum of New York society where already he had numerous friends and admirers. He possessed an unequaled gift for gaining the confidence of wealthy persons, and the inevitable result was that many of them consulted him as to their personal troubles—matters which they thought too delicate to be whispered to the police or to any existing private agency.

Thus the association became a detective bureau with a list of clients which would have been amazing except that it was wholly under cover. These persons were not alarmed by the criminal record of Newcomb's lieutenants whose experience and cleverness were guarantees of efficiency, while safety was assured by Newcomb's personal pledge. Many confidential affairs were in the association's hands when Newcomb suddenly married Mrs. Constance Haven, a charming widow, dowered with several millions; and the happy couple started on a wedding tour around the world!

Of what did the association really consist, after its distinguished founder's gay departure? Its corner stone was the well-known William Harris, formerly a cracksman, admittedly the best man in his line; Scotch-English by descent, serious minded like all Scotchmen, slow witted like a great many Englishmen; in person of a moderate stature, heavy-shouldered, somber of countenance, with a strong jaw and pale gray eyes.

The original pillars were Jack Pinney, dark, lean, sinuous, emotional, probably with some Latin blood, ready of speech in many different tongues; and Frank Gleason, a tall handsome fellow, commonly called a blond for the sake of his splendid yellow hair and delicately tinted skin, but with faintly discernible spots of hazel in his blue eyes, denoting the mixed nature of his ancestry and the instability of his character. Both were men of some education; both were versatile and gifted thieves.

A third pillar had been added, a former pal of Bill's and a lesser artist in the same line; Mike Leonard by name, a clever Irishman of agreeable presence and polite address, but with a record at least twenty years long. Leonard was bound to Bill by ties of friendship and gratitude, but Pinney's chief allegiance was to the devil, and Gleason couldn't be depended on, even for constancy in sin.

Such was the personnel, and yet there was no panic among the clients. The wing of Woodbury Newcomb seemed still to be over that strange nest which he had built. By methods peculiarly his own he had caused it to be known throughout the wide circle of his acquaintance that he reposed absolute confidence in Bill Harris not only as a man reformed in conduct, but as one who had always been essentially trustworthy.

At the time when the Burgoyne affair came on the carpet, Newcomb and his golden bride were in the Far East, and for some time communication with them had been interrupted. The stability of the

association depended on its corner stone and pillars; Newcomb was not there to hold it up. The case of the Burgoyne pearls served, therefore, as a test of the unaided strength of that remarkable structure which the criminologist had reared.

STRAIGHT CROOKS

CHAPTER I

PINNEY'S LOGIC

THERE are days predestined to misfortune, and this was one of them—a very bad day in the rooms of the Reform Association, the atmosphere heavily charged with uneasiness and apprehension. Trouble began before Bill Harris got into his office chair, at the stroke of nine. As he was about to seat himself his downward glance fell on a pile of newspapers awaiting his perusal, and from the topmost sheet, a name in headline type of moderate size seemed to spring out, detached and vivid—the name of Woodbury Newcomb, the association's founder.

WOODBURY NEWCOMB HELD
BY CHINESE BANDITS

Bill leaned on his hands and stared down at the paper, reading the item which bore a Shanghai date line. It appeared that Newcomb and several other Americans, unnamed, had been inspecting some newly discovered oil fields in a region that Bill had never heard of, and had been captured by the forces of a bandit chief who was obstructing the industrial development of his country and was probably

financed from Moscow. Newcomb had displayed remarkable courage and intelligence, doubtless saving the whole party from serious maltreatment. Forces had been sent to their rescue, but their captors had taken them to the mountains where the prisoners would suffer cold and hunger if nothing worse.

Pinney and Gleason, coming in, saw Bill standing with his usual iron rigidity, staring down at this piece of news.

"Mornin'," he said, giving them a corner of one eye. "Listen to this." He read the account with solemn precision, his deep voice seeming to cause a slight vibration of all the heavy objects in the room. It certainly shook Pinney and Gleason, who stared at Bill with infinite amazement, unable to believe it possible that he had fallen for anything like that; but before either of them could speak, the telephone rang.

It was the commissioner of police, calling from his home.

"Hello, Harris. Have you read the papers?"

"About Mr. Newcomb? Yes."

"Anything in it?"

"Nothin' but oil," Bill answered. "Propaganda, aimin' to cause trouble; and foreign interference. It's the old missionary story, dressed up."

"Where is Mr. Newcomb?"

"In Shanghai." Bill inferred it from the date line.

"You'll cable, of course," said the commissioner. "Call me up when you get an answer."

"Sure," Bill said. "Right away."

He hung up.

"So you were on," Pinney said. "I thought you were really worried."

"It gave me a jolt," Bill admitted. "There's a lot of rough-stuff being pulled, over there, while they're shakin' down those Chinks."

"What jolts *me,*" Gleason remarked, "is that the commissioner hopped onto it so quick. You'd better cable Shanghai and every other place where there's a chance. We need something to show that we're in touch with Newcomb every minute."

"Cablin' is expensive," Bill said. "I figure we'll get word from Newcomb, anyhow, in the course o' the day."

With that the ex-burglar sat down to his day's work, depressed by the mere suggestion of disaster to his admired friend and benefactor. Pinney and Gleason were equally disturbed, though not so unselfishly. They were not alarmed by the fake of a lying propagandist in the pay of sordid interests; yet they had been reminded that their absent patron was not immune to the accidents of travel or to microbes in the drinking water. If he should die, what would become of the association and their comfortable jobs?

With Gleason this was only a passing thought, injurious to his stability and tending to prepare his mind for the temptation to which he was presently to be subjected. With Pinney it became the crystallizing point for dangerous ideas which he had long entertained, but which had lacked definite form.

In the afternoon there came a cable message from

Newcomb in Shanghai. It was extravagantly long, but of course contained no reference to the bandit fable. He was leaving immediately for the region in which the imaginary outrage was said to have taken place. Doubtless this had become known, and was the basis for the fake which had been printed, through some error, sooner than its authors intended.

Somehow the message got on Frank Gleason's nerves. Alone with Pinney in their private room, the Apollo of reform paced the floor, passing his hand rather wildly through his beautiful yellow hair.

"I have a strong hunch that something's going to happen to Newcomb," he declared.

Pinney ignored this remark, his attention being otherwise engaged. The door of the manager's room stood open, but Bill himself was not visible from Pinney's position. The person in view was Theophilus Badger, that queer old fossil, countersigning in his capacity as treasurer the day's checks which had previously been adorned with the heavy signature of William Harris. Some one closed the door from the other side, and Pinney turned to Gleason.

"If we wanted to do stunts with the association's bank balance," Jack remarked, "we couldn't ask Providence for anything softer than Badger. But do we want to?"

"Oh, I guess not," Gleason responded. "We've given our word to Newcomb; that settles it, so far as I'm concerned. Besides, how could we get past Bill?"

Pinney meditated, slowly shaking his head.

"Not big enough," he said after a while. "We don't carry the balances we did when Newcomb was here. Fifteen or twenty thousand—what does that amount to?"

"Not worth the trouble," Gleason assented. "I'd rather stick to my job—as long as it lasts." Upon these words the two men exchanged a glance, each looking sidelong at the other.

Pinney exhaled through his nostrils two clouds of high-priced and exceptionally poisonous cigarette smoke.

"Getting shaky, are you?" he said. "Well, there's reason. The swells are dropping us."

"They're out of town now, in the middle of June," Gleason said nervously. "When Newcomb gets back——"

"He'll never get back," Pinney said with decision; "not to run this show. He started the association as a personal advertisement, and it won out; he married a fortune. He has no further use for this outfit, my boy. If the swells quit us, we're lost. Newcomb made us fashionable. Do you think Bill Harris can keep us so?"

"Not Bill, of course," said Gleason. "He's a mere passing curiosity."

"A very notable old andiron," Pinney remarked, "but you can't exhibit him forever."

"Still," Gleason rejoined, "*we* seem to have made a real hit with the smart people; at least, so far as I'm concerned, I feel——"

"Yes, I know what *you* feel," Pinney said, "but

it is written that a man shall not live by vanity alone. What do you feel in your pockets? Any real money?"

"Not much," Gleason admitted, "but it comes regularly—and honestly," he added, with an effort.

"Oh, my eye!" rejoined Pinney, with contempt. "Don't be an ass. I'm speaking very seriously to you, Frank; like an elder brother. It's the weakness of men like you that they're too easily contented, too well satisfied with a little transient flattery from men, women, and luck. They don't think of the future. I tell you the day'll come when you'll look back on this opportunity and break your heart with remorse for the way you let it slip. Your acquaintance with all these millionaires will fade away like a dream, and you'll be just where you were when Newcomb picked you up. Make your play now, Frank, while this game is open, before the bank roll is blown in and the house closed forever."

"I'm awake," Gleason responded. "I'm keeping my eyes open."

"You'd better. Bill Harris is a slow man, but he won't *always* believe that Woodbury Newcomb's coming back to run our show; and when old Iron Face wakes up, what's to hinder him from looting this outfit to the last brass tack, him and Mike Leonard? I guess you wouldn't look so pretty to yourself in the glass if that should happen before you'd made your own haul. I'm not talking about the association's money, but about the chance we have, through our connection here, to win a real stake."

Gleason contorted his handsome visage in a spasm of serious thought.

"There's something in what you say," he owned; "but you're wrong about Bill. He won't touch the money, nor do anything deliberate that will throw us down. What I'm afraid of is, that he'll see the finish coming and go crack a safe somewhere. If he does, and gets pinched, that'll break up the game."

"One way or another, the end is bound to come," said Pinney. "I'm giving you timely warning; I'm lending you my brains, Frank, in this crisis of your life, out of sheer good will."

Gleason resented, as usual, his friend's assumption of intellectual superiority.

"All right, professor," he said. "But you want to remember that you're advising me to throw Bill Harris, who's been on the level with both of us every minute. Suppose you and I go into a deal together, and I throw you? What'll you do? Squeal like a pig!"

Pinney understood that this was mere irritation, and, like a woman, he couldn't resist the temptation to increase it.

"You couldn't throw me if you wanted to, Frank," he said. "I have too great an influence over you."

"Your influence will begin to cut real ice," said Gleason, "when you show me a good thing."

The chime in the great, neighboring tower of the Metropolitan rang for five o'clock. Gleason rose.

"I've got a little stunt to do for Bill," he said. "He'll skin me alive if I miss it. Where do we eat, and when?"

"Who pays the bill, my son?" Pinney inquired. "The expense account?"

"Oh, I guess I can put it over," Gleason answered. "Bill will growl, but he got his orders from Newcomb. He has to be liberal."

"Well, in that case, the St. Regis will do," said Pinney. "It's a fair place. Meet me there at seven."

Gleason glanced through the window at the western sky, draped in dull black with wild embroidery of tarnished copper. He took his umbrella and toyed with it uneasily, hesitating by the door.

"Of course I agree with you, Jack," he said at last. "We ought to stake ourselves for life, and do it now. But don't lead me into anything risky. If you do, you'll pull that influence stuff, and it won't go. Understand? I don't want to grab anything and flit. No, sir; none of that in mine. I've been thinking of—of marriage; Newcomb's line, and not mercenary, either; I don't believe in that.

"Anyhow, I want something safe. This game may be going bad just now, as you say, but while it lasts I like it. The old days seem a long way off, Jack, even in so short a time, and I'd be sorry to bring them back. I've gone soft on a lot of things; I'm tamed; the wildness is all out of me. I'd feel rotten if I had to run."

"Run?" Pinney echoed, with scorn. "Not if you stick to me, my boy. I take no risks."

CHAPTER II

FIVE MINT JULEPS

AFTER Gleason's departure, Pinney sat alone, meditating, planning, and sliding into dreams, the actual world agreeably modified into an easy field for miracles of swift finesse and of impenetrable cunning. Imaginary millions had been reaped in this alluring vision when a door opened and Bill Harris intruded the grim reality of his countenance.

"I'm quittin'," he said. "So long."

"Eh?" said Pinney, blinking like a man just awakened. "What's that?"

"I'm through," said Bill. "By, Jack." And he closed the door.

The farewell was merely ceremonial for the close of day, and in Bill's usual manner, but it startled Pinney. He had no rational apprehension that Bill would walk away with the funds of the association, but somehow he seemed to see him doing it; and Pinney paced the floor, attended by very unpleasant fancies, till the advent of a red-armed woman with her brooms and dusters, reminded him that it was time to go home and dress for dinner.

Outdoors, the electric lamps were shining here and there, though by the clock and season it should have been broad daylight. The bluish rays quivered in a copper-tinted haze which seemed to have a taste and

to parch one's throat. The vanguard of the six-o'clock slaves, hurrying home through Madison Square, held their mouths open, and every face wore an expression of thirst. It was difficult to resist this suggestion, but Pinney had a rule of life against solitary drinking, and before he could decide where to break it, destiny intervened.

He saw a very elegant touring car halted at Twenty-sixth Street with the northbound traffic on the Avenue and standing next the curb. On the rear seat, alone, was a somewhat dissipated young gentleman of the smart set, Holden Terry Burgoyne, known since college days as "Holy Terror," or "Holy" for short.

He was dressed in mourning; wore no hat, according to his custom, and his bronze-hued hair glinted in the peculiar light. His lean, smooth-shaven face, straight in the outlines, a little too muscular in the jaw, wore its usual expression of repressed ferocity, and he was looking at the traffic policeman as if he meant to get out and kill him. But, seeing Pinney coming out of the park, his countenance changed instantly and put on a gratified and welcoming look. He waved a hand, and then pushed open the door of the car as Jack approached.

"How are you, Mr. Pinney?" he said, shaking hands and pulling Jack aboard. "I'm particularly glad to see you. We'll go and have a drink."

"Thank you," said Pinney, somewhat dubiously, for he had had a memorable experience with this gentleman some months ago. "I've time for just one, perhaps."

"I never count 'em," responded Holy, "but it's my impression that I generally *begin* with one, and I am now on the point of doing it."

He made room for Pinney, who narrowly missed sitting down on what seemed to be a five-pound box of candy which lay on the seat. It was wrapped in thin white paper, and tied with a gold cord; and, as Pinney put it aside, he noticed that the wrapper was not so neat and fresh as it might have been; it had a used look. Yet this must be a present for a woman, if the contents really were candy.

Burgoyne half rose and leaned forward, giving an order to the chauffeur, a stolid, powerful Swede; and Pinney took occasion to turn the box over, thus discovering that the wrapper was wrong side out. The name of a well-known candy maker, stamped on the thin paper, showed through, reversed. This was odd, but of no apparent importance.

"Stop at Ponto's, on Thirty-first Street, Nielson," said Burgoyne. And then to Jack: "I haven't seen you in quite a while; I've been rather busy since my aunt's death."

"I ventured to send a word of sympathy," said Pinney, "through the kindness of your cousin, Miss Holden."

Burgoyne made acknowledgment with a gesture exquisitely courteous, and remote from his habitual manner; while Pinney spoke of the young lady's having called at the association's rooms with her chaperon, Mrs. Clarendon.

"As to Aunt Harriet's death," Burgoyne said, "it's a tragedy, in a way. Another social landmark

gone, and a good old party, too, as ever was. Of course she didn't care to hang on any longer; glad to get away. She'd lived for society, and had seen it go to the devil, so what was the use? Blessed release. As for the harpoon she threw into me, I don't blame her. My own fault."

"You surprise me," Pinney said. "I thought you'd fared rather well, you and your cousin. She gets the famous pearls, I believe."

A queer, acid grin slowly overspread the countenance of Holy Burgoyne. His right hand groped for the candy box, and he beat a soft tattoo upon it with his finger tips.

"Yes," said he, "the will gives the beads to Cousin Anna, along with about two millions, the same as I get; but everything's in trust with old Oswald G. Saintsbury. That's the harpoon I was speaking of. We'll get what he gives us, for the next ten or fifteen years. I'll have to engage a trained nurse for some of my creditors, to keep them from committing suicide."

"Speaking of the pearls," said Pinney, "I saw them at the opera last winter, only a day or two before your aunt was taken ill."

"That must have been the paste set," said Burgoyne.

Pinney shook his head, with a smile.

"She passed quite close to me," he said, "and I'm a good judge of pearls."

"The deuce you are!" Burgoyne drummed a little harder on the candy box and studied Pinney with a sidelong look. His eyes were of a bronze hue, with

a red glow, in harmony with his hair, remarkably fascinating. "Have you mentioned that incident?" he said.

"No," Pinney replied, and it was a lie. He had told Frank Gleason at the time, and had given as his own estimate of the value of the pearls, not less than seven hundred thousand dollars.

"Well, as a favor to me, don't speak of it," said Burgoyne. "If you feel that I ought to tell you why——"

"Not at all," Pinney hastened to say.

In fact, he supposed that he understood. The Burgoyne pearls were subject to an inheritance tax, and they were being appraised by Marcellus Rhinehart, of Seitz, Rhinehart & Co., under agreement between the heirs and the State comptroller. Vague rumors had reached Pinney's ears with intimations that the State would be "done," and he suspected that the eminent Oswald G. Saintsbury, for many years legal adviser of Mrs. Burgoyne, and now executor of her will, had coerced or bribed Rhinehart to undervalue the famous pearls, or even to suppress them altogether.

While Pinney turned these matters over in his mind, the car stopped in front of Ponto's, and Burgoyne alighted, taking the candy box, which he carried into the restaurant under his arm!

Wild horses began to gallop in Pinney's brain. The establishment of Seitz, Rhinehart & Co.—commonly known as Seitz's—is on Fifth Avenue, south of Twenty-third Street. Burgoyne might have been there.

"I suggest mint juleps," Burgoyne said, as they entered the more or less secret bar at the rear of the long, dimly lighted dining room. Pinney would have preferred a milder beverage, but he yielded to persuasion.

Another round of juleps was consumed a few minutes later, in a speak-easy on Thirty-fifth Street, and again the candy box was under Holy's arm as he drank. This was the case also at the well-known Bandusia Inn which was their next stopping place.

By this time no rational mind could entertain the notion that the box held candy, or anything of only moderate value. What could it contain that was precious enough to inspire caution in Holy Burgoyne, the most reckless man alive? Surely a thing of great price, or one whose safety involved a special obligation of honor; an article not his own and impossible to replace. The Burgoyne pearls satisfied both branches of this conjecture, and, moreover, the suspicion of hocus-pocus in the matter of the appraisal fitted well with the trick of the candy box which Pinney now recognized as a blind, doubtless a cover for jewelry.

"My dear fellow," he said, in an affectionate tone, not wholly assumed, but issuing more or less naturally from three mint juleps, "haven't we had enough? You'll forgive me, but you're beginning to show it a little; and, as I venture to suspect that you're taking that candy to a lady——"

"To my cousin," said Burgoyne, with sudden gravity. "You're quite right to remind me of my condition. I will attend to it."

This was what Pinney had expected and fished for; it confirmed his theory. It meant that Burgoyne was carrying the pearls secretly from Rhinehart to Miss Holden. It meant for Pinney that the chance of a lifetime had come.

His muddled brain was incapable of asking why a girl not yet out of college, staying for a little while at a New York hotel, should care to be burdened with the custody of pearls worth three quarters of a million, or why such a wise old fox as Oswald G. Saintsbury should permit her to have them. The size of the box, Holy's manner of handling it, the fact that it had come from the direction of Marcellus Rhinehart and was certainly going toward Anna Holden, the prompt rising of the pearls as a subject of conversation between himself and Burgoyne—these were all conclusive evidences for Jack in his present state.

"Cousin Anna's staying at the Plaza, as you probably know," Holy said. "We'll have one more mint julep at a little club near there."

Nevertheless he ordered the chauffeur to proceed up Broadway instead of back toward the Avenue; and they stopped at a place on Forty-third Street for a fourth round of juleps. It was characteristic of Burgoyne that drink affected him quickly, and that a fearsome counterfeit of sobriety settled upon him after he had passed a certain point. He had no appetite for liquor; never touched it except with deliberation, nor felt the lack of it in periods of total abstinence. Pinney, watching him as a cat watches a bird which it is stalking, judged that Burgoyne was

drinking to forget something which preyed on his mind, and that he had partially succeeded.

In fact, he seemed to have forgotten the candy box itself when they made their next halt. This was at the Hotel Astor, not for mint juleps of course, but because Holy had conceived the idea that he must telephone to Cousin Anna.

He got out, leaving the candy box behind, a piece of recklessness that chilled Pinney's blood. But he couldn't call Holy's attention to it, or carry it into the hotel himself, or be left with it in his care. The best he could do was to let a dust robe fall over it where it lay on the seat; and he suffered torments of anxiety, in the hotel, while waiting for Holy to decide that he wouldn't telephone. The box was under the robe, however, when the two inebriates returned to the car.

Burgoyne seemed not to know where it was, nor to care. He had passed into a sternly contemplative mood, as if he were weighing the elements of some momentous decision, but he had not ceased to be companionable nor once forgotten the requirements of courtesy.

What concerned Pinney was that Burgoyne would never be able to testify to the presence of the jewels in the car after the call at the Astor. With exquisite cleverness, despite his condition, Pinney worked the robe and the box behind him, where it would be safe from Holy's accidental touch. Nothing more could be done at the moment. To cut into the box with a knife would be hazardous, and perhaps futile; there might be a more solid container

inside the pasteboard. How he was to get the pearls Jack did not know. So far as he may be said to have had a plan, it depended on the small chance of encountering Gleason on his way to the St. Regis, where he was due at seven o'clock.

It now lacked ten minutes to that hour. Gleason would long since have abandoned the idea that Pinney was coming home to dress in the apartment which they shared on Forty-fifth Street. He would have wondered what had happened, but there was no reason to suppose that he would fail to keep the engagement. This consideration had led Pinney to suggest to Burgoyne that they should cross to the Avenue directly, and as a result they were now on Forty-fifth Street, going eastward.

Meanwhile they had drunk a fifth round of mint juleps, though poor Jack was far beyond remembering where they had got it. He knew where he was, however—near home—and looking eagerly ahead he saw two taxicabs standing side by side before the door of the house in which he lived. Pinney winked fiercely at this spectacle, and the two cabs merged into one, while several tall men on the sidewalk got together and became Frank Gleason in evening dress, alone.

It seemed important that Burgoyne should not see Gleason at this stage of the proceedings. Pinney took out his watch, pretended to consult it, and let it fall. Burgoyne politely recovered it, but five mint juleps did not expedite the process. There was plenty of time for the car to pass Gleason, and for

Pinney to signal his friend to follow, and to be cautious.

At the Avenue there was the usual halt for a chance to cross and turn into the stream of northbound traffic. Gleason's cab drew up close alongside, but nothing was to be seen of its occupant except one hand whose fingers idly rapped out a bit of a tune on the top of the lowered glass of the door. The tune carried words for any one who knew how to read them. They were: "Put me wise. Play safe. Play safe."

The warning was wasted. Seven hundred thousand dollars' worth of pearls were talking to five mint juleps, and there was a poor chance for Frank Gleason to be heard. Pinney had already got the candy box free of the dust robe and under his coat on the side away from Burgoyne, but by this time there were half a dozen vehicles lined up behind. He could deflect Holy's attention long enough to pass the box into the cab, but how about all those witnesses in the rear? The risk was too great.

A swirl of wind laden with dust came suddenly along the street from the westward, and a dash of rain out of the cloud that had long threatened.

"Get the top on, Nielson," said Burgoyne, rising to assist.

Pinney rose also, with a wild elation in his heart. The quick spasm of excitement sobered him; he had a sense of being at his best and beyond it. Clever as most conjurors who make their living by the art, he experienced none of the trouble that an ordinary person would have had in handling an object so large

as the candy box and keeping it always shielded by his body as he glided from the car like a ghost. Burgoyne was unsteadily preparing to follow him; Nielson had not yet begun to hoist himself from his seat. In a flash Pinney turned the trick, and the candy box was in Gleason's cab.

The wave of exhilaration which had borne Jack gloriously to the touch of this achievement now broke all over him in a whirlpool. He couldn't tell the top of Holy's car from the wheels, but to be doing something was a relief to his nerves. Holy was equally fuddled, equally diligent, and between them they made the patient and laborious Swede do everything at least twice. Before the work was done the tangle on the Avenue had been dissolved by the traffic policeman, and Gleason's cab had floated away with the stream. Then at last Burgoyne and Pinney got aboard the car from opposite sides and fell into each other's arms in the interior gloom.

"My fault, old boy," said Burgoyne handsomely. "It's evident I need something to straighten me up. There's a little club on Fifty-fifth Street," and he gave the order to Nielson.

The last thing in the world that Pinney wanted was another mint julep, but he was glad to turn into Fifty-fifth Street and pass the St. Regis. The dinner engagement had blown up in a blaze of incomparable glory, but Gleason would probably let himself be taken to the hotel rather than attract his cabman's attention by a change of address. Pinney kept an eye open for Gleason's cab, in vain; there were plenty of cabs, but they bore no marks of

identification for a vision and a memory so confused. "I'll certainly see no better when I come out," he thought, as he followed Holy into the club.

The sixth mint julep was the nickel in the slot for Burgoyne, and his peculiar mechanism responded almost instantly. He began to breathe more deeply, his eye brightened, and his countenance assumed its alert and formidable aspect. Pinney was not surprised, for he had seen the man similarly transformed on the previous occasion which has been mentioned, and he knew what must now take place.

Burgoyne slowly lifted his right hand and put it under his left elbow. Then he nodded several times.

"Did you happen to notice what I did with that box? he asked. "Is it in the car, do you think?"

Pinney looked perplexed.

"Oh!" he said, after a nicely measured pause. "The candy? I don't remember seeing it since we stopped at that place on—Forty-third street, was it?"

Burgoyne set down his glass.

"If the box is in the car," he said, "I shall drink no more for one year. If it is not there, I shall never drink again while I live."

Pinney felt an insane desire to laugh. It seemed a good joke that he, an officer of the Reform Association, should have reformed Holy Burgoyne. "If his word's any good," said Pinney to himself, "he's gone dry forever and I've done it."

A press of cabs had prevented them from stopping directly in front of the club, and though the way was now clear, the slow Swede had not moved. Burgoyne strode straight to the car, through the rain;

distancing Pinney who staggered after him, hazily seeing him climb aboard and illuminate the interior.

But the expected explosion did not occur; there was no sound even of a search. Pinney clutched the car door and looked in, and saw him sitting with the candy box on his knee!

The surprise was paralyzing, but fortunately Jack had the door to hold him up.

"My sentence is one year," Holy said, tapping the box. "A special kind," he added. "If I'd lost it, I should have disappointed Cousin Anna."

The explanation of his anxiety was good enough, from one drunken man to another. Pinney let it pass as natural, his mind being overwhelmed. He was astounded at Gleason's nerve and cleverness in restoring the box; he wouldn't have believed it; he rebelled against the undeniable fact. The dullard of the family had suddenly distinguished himself, and the smart brother enviously resented this refutation of an opinion long confidently asserted. There even flashed through Pinney's mind a form of words to nip the vanity which Frank would certainly exhibit.

These instinctive promptings were speedily reenforced by the discovery that the wrapper of the box, which had been wrong side out, was now properly put on. Here was an error of Gleason's which might have had immediate and lamentable consequences; but Burgoyne failed to see any sign that the box had been tampered with, and he revealed no uneasiness as to its contents.

"I've told Nielson to go to the Plaza," he said.

"I'll see Cousin Anna for just a moment. Wish you'd come along and dine with me afterward."

"Thank you," Pinney replied. "I'd hardly like to appear before Miss Holden just now, and I've a business engagement which will prevent my dining with you, much to my regret."

"Ride with me to the Plaza, anyhow," said Holy. "I'll have Nielson take you home while I'm making my call."

This seemed satisfactory; but when Burgoyne had got out at the Plaza he remained standing beside the car, giving no orders as to its destination. He was steady as a rock now, and he held the candy box tightly tucked under his arm. He appeared to be thinking with extreme and painful intentness.

Pinney eyed him, and was perplexed; he would have said that the man was in trouble, that he was suffering acute mental distress under his inflexible crust. Finally he struck his heel down sharply on the pavement, and Pinney heard him say under his breath: "No, I'm d——d if I can do it!" Then he got into the car.

"I'll ride along with you," he said, and gave the address to Nielson.

Ten minutes later, Pinney was politely set down at his own door, and Burgoyne rode away. Why had he changed his mind at the Plaza? Where was he going with the candy box? To whom—and when—would it be delivered? Jack Pinney would have been very glad to know the answers, but another question pressed even more heavily on his mind, as to whether Gleason had had wit enough to bring the pearls

home, and courage enough to wait there with such immensely valuable and dangerous goods in his possession.

As a matter of fact, Gleason was at that moment looking down from the unlighted window of their living room, where he stayed till Burgoyne's car was well out of the way. Then he turned on the lights and stood facing the door, biting hard on the stem of an empty pipe.

CHAPTER III

SUSPICIONS

BURGOYNE rode to Mr. Saintsbury's house on Fifty-seventh Street, east of the Avenue. The rain, which had been scanty since the first assault, now suddenly swooped down, roaring. A dash of that cold shower might be beneficial, and Holy thrust his bare head out into it as the car slowed up. It felt very good; and he was experimenting with methods for the preservation of his collar when Mr. Saintsbury's gaunt old butler came with an umbrella from the vestibule, where he had been waiting for his master's return. Burgoyne comprehended this, but in order not to cheapen the service rendered to himself, he asked whether Mr. Saintsbury was at home.

"Not yet, sir," was the reply; "but he's telephoned, and dinner's waiting. I thought you might be bringing him, sir."

Burgoyne entered the hall, and was immediately aware of his Cousin Anna's voice, which came to him from the smaller drawing-room on the left.

"Thank goodness, here's Holy," she said excitedly, "and he's got 'em!"

She confronted him as he crossed the threshold, and her aspect was decidedly stormy. Her eyes, of the same strange color as his own, but larger and

brighter, blazed with the wrath that one forgives, youthful and open. Burgoyne was somewhat daunted, not by her temper, which he could have matched at any moment, but by her beauty, which always got the better of him. Behind her, waiting with interest and amusement for the scene to develop, was Mrs. Julia Clarendon, with whom Anna was staying at the Plaza.

"Hello, little cousin!" said Burgoyne. "Good evening, Julia. Are you dining with Mr. Saintsbury to-night?"

Mrs. Clarendon responded with only a bit of a laugh, and just then the hall door closed behind the butler, returning to his post of duty in the vestibule. That was what Anna had been waiting for, and she opened fire instantly:

"Holy, what do you mean by bringing my pearls here? Didn't Count di Senti tell you what I wanted you to do with them?"

Di Senti was connected with Seitz's.

"Yes," said Burgoyne, "he told me."

"Then why didn't you do it?"

"I couldn't take the responsibility, Anna."

"You'd have given them to Mr. Saintsbury." Her voice shook with wrath. "You're afraid of him, and I think it's utterly contemptible; not like you, Holy." A frozen, piratical grin appeared on Holy's countenance, and Mrs. Clarendon smothered a laugh—whereat Anna's temper rose and her eyes blazed. "The pearls are mine, and I want them!"

She put out her hand with a gesture splendidly commanding, but the candy box remained under Bur-

goyne's arm, clasped in football fashion. Anna cast one fiery glance at the long fingers over the end of the box. In childhood she had liked to play with her cousin, rather rough play; she had even done it quite recently, and she knew how strong he was. There was no use trying a quick grab.

She turned and walked to the other side of the room, as if she meant to do something desperate. Then she walked back again in the same manner. Her head was uncovered; there was a scarf around her shoulders which had served to protect her hair, bronze-hued, abundant, and very beautiful. The light from the chandelier played on the wavy masses, and Holy Burgoyne watched the gleam and glory of that spectacle.

"I'm as sentimental as a meat ax," he said; "but you're my little cousin, the only member of the family I never quarreled with. Can't we make a treaty about these pearls? I don't care a hoot for what old Saintsbury'll do to me; I'm only afraid you'll do something foolish. Perhaps Mrs. Clarendon can help us out."

"I suppose Anna wants the pearls as a safeguard," the lady said, "in case Mr. Saintsbury shuts off her supplies."

"Well," said the girl, "isn't that sensible? He's very likely to do it."

"For any particular reason?" Mrs. Clarendon asked, with half a glance at Burgoyne. "You haven't mentioned any to me."

Anna was silent.

"I don't quite see how you could keep the pearls,"

Mrs. Clarendon went on. "You're not of age, and Mr. Saintsbury's your guardian. He'd take them away from you."

"I'd like to see him get them," Anna retorted. "I'd throw them into the river."

"Or make him think you'd done so, my dear," said Mrs. Clarendon. "That would be better, wouldn't it?"

"Pretend to lose them, you mean," said Burgoyne, "then spout them on the quiet, and be independent till Saintsbury dies and there's a new deal. I couldn't advise such a game, not for Anna. She'd never put anything like that over on Saintsbury."

"It's precisely what he himself is doing, isn't it?" Anna rejoined. "Didn't he tell the State comptroller, or whatever you call him, that the pearls were stolen a year ago? That's a lie and a fraud and a crime, and we're all committing it; but I couldn't go to jail for losing my own pearls. Not that I mean to do such a thing——"

"Really I don't see why you should," said Mrs. Clarendon, "unless there's going to be a row with Mr. Saintsbury right away."

She gave a glance at Burgoyne, who was studying her shrewdly; in fact, each of them was trying to make out how much the other guessed as to the hidden motive for Anna's conduct.

"As for income," said Burgoyne, turning to his cousin, "you don't need much. You've another year in college and——"

"I'm not going back," said Anna. "I shall live in New York."

"Well, that'll raise a fuss, sure enough," Mrs. Clarendon admitted, "but it doesn't have to come till September. You're through with Radcliffe for this year, except for a few exams."

Anna panted with impatience and exasperation.

"Oh, we shall stand here, talking," she burst out, "and Mr. Saintsbury'll come, and that'll settle it. Can't we go to the hotel and talk there?"

Burgoyne shook his head and turned away. He couldn't look at her any longer, he felt too strongly tempted to do a foolish thing. In fact it was a folly to turn his back upon her, for she sprang after him, quick and light as a kitten, and pulled the box from under his arm.

"Now I've got it," she cried, "and I'm going to keep it." She darted out into the hall, calling over her shoulder: "Come on, Holy, if you want to. We can talk just the same."

Mrs. Clarendon, who had been attracted toward the window by a sound from without, uttered a warning that was unheard. Anna flung open the door, and crashed against Mr. Saintsbury on the threshold. The box fell from her hands and bounced into the vestibule, where the grim old butler, very spry for his years, picked it up and gave it to his master.

"Now you'll be roasted on both sides," Mrs. Clarendon whispered to Burgoyne as he paused to let her pass before him into the hall.

Mr. Saintsbury was in his sixty-seventh year, but he was a stranger to the timidities of age. The collision had been sudden and really violent, yet there was

nothing to indicate that Mr. Saintsbury had been startled. As to the candy box and the use for which it was intended, he was already informed, and he seemed not to care what his unruly ward had been trying to do with it, but he kept a good grip on it with one hand or the other while the butler was relieving him of his hat and raincoat.

His deeply furrowed face of a Scotch type, with cold blue eyes and a long upper lip, wore its ordinary expression, which was as if he were looking down with saturnine contempt upon the antics of children. Intellectual arrogance was the dominant note of his character.

A nod and a stare were his greeting to Burgoyne and Anna, but he showed a kind of cordiality toward Mrs. Clarendon whom he had long suspected of possessing a mind. As for her beauty, he was so far sensible of it as to be slightly irritated by the knowledge that everybody admired it.

An aristocrat alert for every corollary of his conviction, he did not wish to share in general applause of anything, except when perfectly assured that the inferior persons were deceived. If there had been any way of regarding Mrs. Clarendon's beauty as secretly adverse to the interests of the common people, Mr. Saintsbury would have enjoyed walking with her in crowded places.

He had once been a fine figure of a man, but was now meager with years, a fact which he refused to admit, resenting the least effort on his tailor's part to vary from the measure taken two decades ago. Consequently his frock coat hung in folds and creases,

not much helped by his habit of stuffing all his pockets with great sheaves of documents and letters.

With scant ceremony he ushered the ladies and Burgoyne into the room which they had just left and seated them by the window. Then, without apology, he walked away, opening the candy box as he went and eventually setting it on a table in a far corner, where he looked privately at its contents. This done, he turned about, clasped his hands behind his back, and stalked slowly the length of the room again, his white old nose pointing straight at Anna.

"When and by whom," said he, halting within a pace of her, "were you informed that Mr. Rhinehart wanted to get rid of the pearls—the real ones?"

"Cousin Holy told me last evening."

"Is that true?" the lawyer asked, turning to Burgoyne.

"My word can add nothing to Cousin Anna's," responded Holy, the more carefully chivalrous for not being quite sober. "Besides, I told you so, if you remember."

"As a result of that conversation," Saintsbury resumed, addressing Anna, "you went to Seitz's this forenoon, taking that box with you."

"Yes, sir," said she. "I thought Mr. Rhinehart might want me to smuggle the pearls out of the store, so I took the old candy box to put them in. But he wouldn't give me the pearls."

"So you asked your cousin to get them?"

"I did. He came and took us to luncheon, and I asked him then. He said that Mr. Rhinehart

wouldn't give the pearls to anybody unless you told him to. Didn't Cousin Holy see you——"

"Yes," the lawyer interrupted, "and I am now investigating his story." He turned to Burgoyne. "Will you state just what happened when you went to Seitz's?"

"I saw Rhinehart, and he told me that he'd had an O. K. from you by telephone. Anna had left the candy box there, and Rhinehart got it out of his safe and gave it to me, all wrapped up, with the pearls inside."

"With the pearls inside," said Saintsbury. "How do you know?"

At this, Anna sprang up and ran to the table in the corner. White tissue paper on top to some extent concealed the deeper contents of the box, but its nature was sufficiently disclosed. Anna uttered a cry like the howl of some peculiarly melodious animal; she seized the box and turned it upside down. A shower, not of pearls, but of hardware, fell clattering to the floor—a short iron wrench, a broken pair of pincers, and the head of a hammer.

She stood for a moment staring down at this rubbish, and still holding the box aloft. Then she let it fall, and addressed her guardian across the full length of the room.

"Mr. Saintsbury, what have you done with my pearls? You're merely pretending to question Holy! You made Mr. Rhinehart do this, and I know it, and I won't stand for it. You'll have to give me my pearls. If you don't, I'll tell the whole story to everybody."

The high, clear trumpet of her tone momentarily disconcerted Saintsbury, and he hastened to reduce the range by several long paces. Holy and Mrs. Clarendon followed him, while Anna stood her ground and waited for them.

"What story?" the lawyer demanded, recovering his poise.

"That we're cheating the State out of the inheritance tax," Anna replied. "You got Mr. Rhinehart to say that Aunt Harriet's pearls had been stolen and that we had only the paste set. I'll certainly tell this——"

"Indeed!" Saintsbury interposed. "Have you seen the pearls since your aunt's death?"

"Of course not; but didn't you just say that Mr. Rhinehart had them and wanted to get rid of them?"

"Nothing of the sort. I asked when some one told you so. Can you prove that any person has seen the real pearls since the date of the robbery?"

"Robbery!" she echoed. "There wasn't any, and we all know it. Of course I ought not to be rude like this, but you make me so. Aunt Harriet gave me her pearls because she wished me to have them—now, while I'm young. It isn't right for you to deprive me of them, and I'm simply driven to tell you again that I won't stand it."

Saintsbury shook his finger at her.

"Can you *prove* anything?" he demanded. "No, you can't, and I'll see to it that you don't try."

"There's my evidence, you know," Holy remarked. "Cousin Anna'll have that, whatever it's worth. I saw the pearls this afternoon."

"Then I'll be gratified if you'll account for their disappearance," the lawyer retorted. "Your evidence, indeed!" If you were absurd enough to give it publicly, I should have some trouble to keep you out of jail. Sit down, all of you." He turned again to Burgoyne. "You haven't answered my former question. How do you know that the pearls were in the box?"

"Because I opened it."

"For what reason?"

"The ladies will pardon me if I mention the reputation of Mr. Rhinehart," Holy responded. "It happened to drift athwart me like a breath from the subway at six in the afternoon. So I looked at the pearls."

"In Mr. Rhinehart's presence?"

"No, sir. Di Senti happened to come in, and I went into the adjoining office."

"Count di Senti's?"

"Rhinehart lets him use the room, I believe. It's not his especially."

"Did he go in with you?"

"No, sir," said Holy. "I was alone; no one else saw the pearls. I wrapped up the box again and took it out to my car."

"Who was in the car?"

"Nobody but Nielson."

"Where did you go after leaving Seitz's?"

"I went and lost Anna's pearls," Burgoyne replied. "Just how I did it I don't know, but I accept the responsibility. If the pearls are not recovered imme-

diately, of course I'll pay Anna the full value from my share of the estate."

"In money?" the girl asked excitedly. "But you can't. Mr. Saintsbury won't let you. I wouldn't take it, anyhow, if you really lost the pearls by accident."

Mr. Saintsbury ignored the interruption. He pointed that ivory dart, his old forefinger, at Burgoyne, repeating his unanswered question:

"Where did you go?"

"In the language of the school geographies," said Holy, "I took a winding northerly course to the Hotel Plaza."

"Why, Holy, what time was this?" Anna interposed. "We waited till after six, and then I got frightened, thinking you might come here——"

Saintsbury cut her short, addressing Burgoyne.

"So you didn't bring these ladies," said he. "What *did* you do?"

"Nothing. I got out of my car and then got in again, and rode down the Avenue."

"For what purpose?"

"To take a gentleman home," said Burgoyne. "I had picked up Mr. Pinney at Twenty-sixth——"

"Jack Pinney!" exclaimed Mrs. Clarendon. "Thank Heaven! Now we know what happened to the pearls."

It may be remembered that Mrs. Clarendon was a participant in those adventures which led to the founding of Newcomb's Association. She had known Harris, Gleason, and Pinney in their unregenerate state, before the famous shepherd of black sheep

chose them to be his own little flock. The acquaintance with these men took rank among the most amusing and most valued of the lady's varied experiences and she never failed to visit the association's rooms when she was in town.

"Pinney's quite out of it," said Burgoyne. "He was never alone with the box for an instant; never out of my sight. You're only guessing, Julia. Don't you see that you're accusing this man of stealing five pounds of candy? He didn't know what was in the box."

"What Jack Pinney knows, and what you think he knows, are two very different things," she rejoined. "I've had experience of that. Anyhow, he's under suspicion, and that's all we care about. The association is in a mess, and Bill Harris will have to get it out by finding the pearls." She rose. "I'll send him here as soon as I can find him."

Mr. Saintsbury had no appetite for confidential dealings with Bill Harris, whom he knew by reputation, and naturally distrusted.

But there was really no alternative to Mrs. Clarendon's suggestion. It was manifestly impossible to consult the police, and though Mr. Saintsbury had employed private detective agents in very delicate matters, there was none to whom he cared to tell the story of the pearls. Virtually he would have to be his own detective in this case, and it might be well to begin by questioning and, if possible, intimidating Harris.

"Can I reach this man by telephone?" he asked, but Mrs. Clarendon interposed a strenuous objection.

"You mustn't talk to Bill Harris till I've prepared his mind," she said. "You couldn't make a dent in him. I'll go to his rooms, and, if he's out, I'll hunt him up. Pray Heaven I find him at dinner, for otherwise I shan't get any. Holy, will you take Anna somewhere?"

"I don't want any dinner," the girl declared. "I'm going back to the Plaza and shut myself into my room. I don't want to see anybody, not even you, Cousin Julia, till I get over this. Holy'll stay here; Mr. Saintsbury wants to talk to him."

The lawyer nodded, and Burgoyne groaned. He offered his car to Mrs. Clarendon, but she preferred to take a cab. When it had come, Burgoyne put the two ladies aboard, and he took occasion to say, by way of a message to Bill Harris, that he was unalterably convinced of Pinney's innocence and would so testify before gods and men.

"As to your pearls, Anna," he added, "I wish you could know how I feel. My conduct must seem to you insanely reckless, as usual; but I hope the devil will fly away with me if I'm ever really careless of your interests. I'll try to make this up to you, some day."

What Anna said was lost in the musty inwards of the cab, from which, five minutes later, she alighted at the Plaza. But she did not go to her room. Instead she passed swiftly through the hotel and took another cab, in which she rode down the Avenue not very far behind Mrs. Clarendon.

CHAPTER IV

PINNEY DISCOURAGED

THE Burgoyne pearls were the largest stake in jewels that Jack Pinney had ever played for, and beyond comparison with any he had ever won. After such a job, a man's mind seems to halt while the details of the performance overtake him in a wild flood of memory which his will can neither check nor guide. In this manner Pinney, on his way home, had been constrained to review his work in turning out the masterpiece of crime just done.

There were fleeting pangs of fear, moments of false recollection when he shrank aghast from fatal errors which he hadn't committed; but none of these phantoms had the least stability, and the ease with which he banished them increased his self congratulation.

Vanity and mint julep are able to occupy the same space at the same time, and Pinney was full of both. It was as if he had evoked the pearls from Rinehart's safe by an effort of the intellect, and had foreordained the meeting with Burgoyne and the equally essential encounter with Gleason. He hugged himself at the thought of having made Burgoyne his witness. Holy was a gentleman; he would not only stand true to a friend in whose innocence he believed; he would also square Anna Holden for the

loss of her pearls. This was a welcome thought to Pinney who had been madly in love with the girl, for a day or two, after Mrs. Clarendon had first brought her to the rooms of the association.

These thoughts and innumerable others whirled through Pinney's head while he was riding down the Avenue with Holy, and parting from him without signs of nervous haste—the hardest part of the whole proceeding. For by this time he had begun to be tormented by the one fear which could not be dismissed, the fear of an indiscretion on the part of Gleason.

There would be no real safety until the pearls were in Pinney's own hands; until his brain should assume the absolute direction of every move in the game. Suspicion would inevitably arise and must be quelled, and the sale of the pearls would call for the most delicate artistry. All this was far beyond Gleason's register; Frank was a good fellow and should be fairly treated in the division of the profits, but he must not try to do any independent thinking; he must take orders from a competent intelligence.

Fortunately the rain excused Pinney for running across the sidewalk from the car. He would have liked to fly up into the apartment through the window, but even to run was a relief, and he ran so easily on the level that he was surprised at the irregular and baffling behavior of the stairs. He found himself stumbling, and clutching at the numerous banister rails which floated illusively in the air. Three times he fell flat, and he came to the second-story hall on all fours.

Nothing of this sort would do in Gleason's presence. Frank had talked in too high a key that afternoon; he would be very likely to display this spirit again if he should suspect that the elder and abler soldier was the worse for drink. Wherefore, Pinney made a mighty effort in the hall, outside the door which opened directly into their living room; he attained and carefully tested his equilibrium, and entered the apartment as straight as anybody ever walked, or so he thought. He closed the door with his back, however, and the force of gravitation, which seldom acts normally after the sixth mint julep, suddenly became a horizontal force and glued his shoulders to the panel.

Gleason confronted him in dress trousers and shirt, a towering and dominant figure, and he looked down on Jack with an arrogant disfavor unprecedented in their relations.

"Stewed," said he. "I thought so."

"Don't fool yourself, my son," said Pinney. "I'm sober enough to run this job. Where are the pearls?"

"Ask of the oysters," responded Gleason, with derision. "Pearls? Was that what you thought you were getting?"

Pinney had been pale enough before, but he went three shades paler. He got away from the door, and stood erect and steady.

"Are you trying to scare me sober?" he said, with ominous quiet in his manner. "Or is this a holdout?"

Gleason's clear skin flushed in an instant. He took

his pipe from between his teeth and let it fall on the floor.

"I'll tell you what kind of a holdout it is," he said. "I held us both out of jail. You'd put us in; you, the safety player, the man who was going to take no risks. What was our agreement? What did you promise me this afternoon? And within an hour you let me in for a trick turned in the middle of the street with everybody looking."

"Well," said Pinney, "go on. What did you do?"

"I turned that box back. Didn't you find it in the car?"

"We found the box," Pinney replied. "You'd opened it, of course?"

"Not me," said Gleason. "I wouldn't take the risk."

"But you did take it," Pinney said, "and you bungled the job. You put the wrapper on the box the wrong way. I noticed that, and I've got you dead to rights. You threw quite a bluff this afternoon, Prettiness, but you're not smooth enough to get-away with it. Come across with those goods."

Gleason was taken aback, but only for a moment.

"Well," said he, "you're right. I did open the box. I knew there'd be a run-in between you and me, and I wanted to be sure what the fracas was about."

"It's about a small matter," Pinney responded. "Only the Burgoyne pearls."

"What!" The word came out of Gleason's big chest like the roar of a lion.

"You've got a grand voice, Frank," said Pinney, "but it doesn't get over."

Gleason took him by the two shoulders.

"Listen, Jack," he said; "there was nothing in that box except weights—two or three old tools from an automobile kit. Of course I meant to tell you this, after I'd shaken you down a bit for what you'd done. That box was a trick package. Whether it had held valuable stuff, or had merely been fixed up to pass off on somebody, I couldn't tell, of course. Sit down, Jack; you'll fall."

Pinney was well sobered by this time. He released himself from Gleason's grip, and leaned on a chair back, looking up at Frank and studying his countenance with ever-increasing despair.

"Weights, you say?" he muttered. "Somebody beat me to it, eh?"

"What makes you think the pearls were ever there?" Gleason asked.

"I know they were," Pinney replied, and gave a brief summary of his inferences.

Gleason seemed to be impressed; he even passed a compliment on Pinney's acumen.

"But I don't understand the weights; they were too heavy," he said. "Between four and five pounds, I should think. That seems ridiculous, as a dummy for pearls."

"They weren't merely a necklace, you know," Pinney reminded him; "they were a harness. They covered the whole front of Mrs. Harriet Burgoyne, and she was no sylph. She was built like a robin."

"Well, we'd better forget them. They're lost to us."

"Not while I draw breath," said Pinney fiercely. "If you're on the level. Holy's got the beads. He's robbed his little cousin, a mere schoolgirl—think of it, Frank!—and I'll get those pearls away from him or bleed him white."

"I thought Holy inherited two millions," Gleason objected. "Why should he do a thing like this?"

"Because he had to," Jack rejoined promptly. "He's been a high liver, always in debt, and his inheritance has put him in a worse hole than the one he was in before. He can't get a dollar, but his creditors won't believe it. They'll squeal to Oswald G. Saintsbury, the trustee. There's the motive, all right."

"You say Holy'd just come from Seitz's when you met him," said Gleason. "His car was standing still. I'll bet he was laying for you."

"Hardly for me. Possibly for you; more likely for Bill. Holy knows Bill's time card—probably just missed him. I think Bill may have been a little early to-day."

"And you are the goat," said Gleason. "Can you meet it, Jack? Of course I'll stand by you——"

Pinney laughed. "You poor simp," he said, "don't you comprehend your situation? If Holy put up this job, he was on the watch and saw me make the pass."

"But he didn't see canny little Frank." Gleason tapped himself on the breast. "He can't prove that I was in that cab. Ike Feinburg was driving me."

Feinburg was an escaped convict who had become the owner of several taxicabs in New York and was doing well. Gleason could have sent him back to California to serve out a life sentence.

"Well," Pinney admitted, "Ike can't squeal on you. But that doesn't let you out of this game, Frank. I hold you to the obligations of partnership, and you want to borrow a conscience that will tell you what they are. Borrow Bill's; for partnership matters it's the best on the market. *We*—understand me—*we* are still after those pearls, and if one of us plays false, he will get shot through his yellow head. That goes, Blondy."

There came a slow knock at the door. It sounded as if the caller had rapped discreetly with a piece of iron.

"Bill!" Gleason whispered, going suddenly pale. "Can he be on?"

Pinney walked softly up to him and touched him with a finger on the breast. "Think while there's time, Frank," he said. "You're going up against Bill Harris in another minute, and he's a solid man. Don't try to throw us both. If you've got the pearls, speak up. You're the man falling off the ladder. Find mercy for your soul before you hit the ground."

Gleason looked him straight in the eyes.

"I'm on the level, Jack," he said. "I've told you the truth."

The whole of Pinney's body went hollow with the loss of his last hope that Gleason had the pearls. It would have been so easy to get them away from him, and for a moment the alternative looked so hard, so

cruelly unjust. He steadied himself with a hand on Gleason's arm; controlled his haggard countenance and forced it to assume a smile; then crossed the room nimbly and opened the door. Bill Harris was revealed, in an attitude of infinite patience.

He came in slowly, looking down at the point of his umbrella to see whether it was wet enough to drip. He was in evening dress, with a raincoat hanging open on his ample bosom. A modest satisfaction, having its root in conscience, gravely rewarded Harris when he walked the streets so dressed at night, with all that white expanse for every lamp to shine upon. It advertised the openness of his errand and the alteration of his life. It was almost like doing something for Mr. Newcomb, who had put him straight.

Especially he liked to call on his associates with a little matter of business out of hours. The thought of their partnership, the idea of confidence and of mutual effort for the association was an unfading and a solemn joy.

"No hurry on my account," he said. "I got a little business, not very pressin'."

Pinney understood Bill's feeling in such matters, and never failed to encourage the illusion of an interest agreeably shared by all.

"We're always ready for business, Bill," he said briskly. "Sit down and put us wise."

Bill took his accustomed chair, hard, with a straight back.

"You know the Burgoyne pearls," said he. "Where do you figure they are?"

Both of Gleason's elbows slipped from the mantelpiece, against which he had been posing, and he nearly fell into the grate. This made considerable noise, but Bill moved not one eyelash. He was still contemplating the umbrella's point.

"The Burgoyne pearls?" said Pinney. "What's the lay, Bill?"

"State comptroller," said Bill. "I been dining with him. On the association."

"I see." Pinney nodded wisely. "It's the tax."

"Dodgin' it," said Bill. "They claim the pearls were stolen. Rhinehart says so."

"What does the comptroller want you to do?"

"Investigate the robbery. How can I investigate nothin'?"

Gleason got a signal from Pinney to show signs of life, so he asked what story was being told about the robbery. Bill replied that Mrs. Burgoyne put the pearls on her bureau one night and went to bed. Next morning they were gone. No break; it seemed to have been an inside job. The case was given to a private agency—Pat Lannigan's. Pat handled it himself, on the quiet.

"Lannigan's been dead two or three months," Pinney said.

"A dead detective don't cost nothin'," Bill remarked. "A live one would come high to stand for that yarn."

"We can't touch this case," Gleason said, with anxiety rather poorly concealed. "I hope you turned it down, Bill."

"The comptroller's a cousin o' Mrs. Newcomb's," Bill responded, with an accent of finality.

Gleason reminded him that Mrs. Clarendon was a friend of the Burgoynes and that Mr. Saintsbury was her legal adviser and trustee. "You know how *she* stands with Mr. Newcomb," he added. "Take my tip and don't get after any friends of hers. The comptroller's pull can't be as strong as Mrs. Clarendon's."

"And Mr. Newcomb in China," said Bill, "where I can't reach him."

Pinney suggested that the proper policy would be to string the comptroller along, but be careful not to find the pearls.

The telephone bell rang, and Gleason went into the next room to answer it. Bill would have awaited his return in silence, but, observing that Pinney's feet looked impatient, he addressed a few remarks to them.

"The comptroller's had two men watchin' Seitz's," he said. "One of 'em reported while we was at dinner. He thinks the pearls were taken away this afternoon in a pasteboard box. Holy Burgoyne took 'em. About half past five."

Jack Pinney felt the cold hand of Fate on the back of his neck, but it did not paralyze his faculty of decision.

"I was waiting for that, Bill," he said. "It fits right in with a little observation of my own. Holy picked me up at Twenty-sixth Street, on his way uptown in his car. He had a candy box, and I think there's one chance in a hundred that the pearls were

in it. I'll tell you why I think so in a minute, but there's one point to be covered first. I don't know what he did with the box. Does the comptroller's man know? Did he follow Holy?"

Pinney gathered his nervous strength to await the fateful answer.

"No," said Bill. "The boob didn't have a taxi ready."

Metaphorically, the electric current was turned off of Pinney, and his body sank back limp into the chair. At this moment Gleason thrust in his pallid countenance from the adjoining room and said:

"It's Mrs. Clarendon. She wants to speak with Bill."

He crossed to Pinney and whispered as soon as it was safe: "The murder's out all over the map. You're up against it."

"No more than you are, son," Pinney rejoined. "We hang together."

Bill's conversation was brief, and he gave no account of it when he returned.

"Go on, Jack," he said, and Pinney gave a mild version of the quest of the ideal mint julep, touching discreetly on the matter of Burgoyne's peculiar dealings with the candy box.

Bill softly drilled into the rug with the point of his umbrella.

"Was the box all right when you left the car, Jack?" he inquired.

"It was for all I know," Pinney replied. "Holy had it on his knee. I'm no X-ray, you understand; I couldn't see the inside of it."

Bill addressed the puncture in the rug while trying to fill it up by pushing in the adjacent fabric.

"They can't charge you with doin' nothin' alone," he said. "Where was Frank at this time?"

"We had a date for dinner——" Gleason began.

"Have you had it?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Too many mint juleps," Pinney explained. "When I finally persuaded Holy to relax his tentacles and bring me home, I wasn't conscious of my usual hearty appetite, Mr. Harris. I asked Frank to wait a while."

"Had he been out?"

"Yes," said each man hastily, afraid that the other would be foolish enough to say no.

"I went to the restaurant," Gleason added. "Jack wasn't there, so I came home."

Bill drew a long breath, then slowly lifted his head and turned the searchlight of his pale-gray eyes on the two men—on Pinney first, on Gleason for the longer space.

"Is that all?" he asked.

"Absolutely all, good old boy," Pinney responded, with such candor and fine sense of loyalty that Gleason, hearing it, was stricken with respectful admiration.

"Absolutely all," said he, striving to be an accurate echo.

In the brief following silence they heard a cab stop before the house.

"Mrs. Clarendon," said Bill. "Comin' for me."

He opened the door and closed it after him with his peculiar quiet.

Pinney collapsed in his chair and was afflicted with shivering. Angered by this weakness, he struck himself on the chest, rose, and went to the window, where he watched Bill get aboard the cab. Gleason had gone to the mantelpiece and was leaning on his elbows with his face in his hands. He spoke, without raising his head:

"Where do you think Burgoyne took the box? To Mrs. Clarendon—or how did she get on?"

"I don't know," said Pinney. "Perhaps she's wise to Holy's game, whatever it is, and wants Bill to block it on the quiet. That may give us more time."

"I think the blow-up will come to-night. What shall we do?"

"Bank on Holy's testimony. It's all we've got to draw to, and it's enough. Holy wasn't followed; nobody's onto you and me, Frank. We're safe as a church."

"Safe as the steeple, with the rest of it on fire," Gleason retorted in a spasm of nervousness. "I tell you, Jack, I'm about ready to jump." He looked it, standing with a strained erectness, pale, the faint color that still showed in his cheeks flickering with the pulsation of his blood. Pinney eyed him with an envious admiration and with contempt achieved only after an effort.

"You're a beauty," he remarked, "but that's all you are."

Some one knocked in a timid, hesitating manner,

but the summons caught Gleason in a defenseless moment, his mind empty except for thoughts of personal danger. Impelled by an unreasoning impulse, he ran to the next room, snatched a small, automatic pistol, and pushed it through the sleeve of a sack coat whose other sleeve he strove for as a cat chases its tail. With the coat on at last, and the pistol in a side pocket, he stood between the rooms, looking out around the edge of a portière, while Pinney answered the knock. The visitor was Nielson, Holy Burgoyne's chauffeur.

CHAPTER V

A WITNESS

THE Swede entered with reluctance, as if some one were pushing him. He was a pleasant-looking, well-mannered fellow in ordinary moments, with a tow head and a delicate skin, white as a baby's on his brow, where it had been protected from the sun. His high color showed through the tan on his cheeks.

He politely closed the door for Pinney, and then stood in an attitude of stolid obstinacy superior to despair, clutching his cap with trembling fingers. He seemed especially impressed by Gleason, who had got the better of his alarms and had emerged from the other room with the manner of a prince. Both he and Pinney had scented trouble instantly, and had assumed an air of dignity as a counter on their adversary's weak point, his obvious embarrassment.

"What is your errand, Nielson?" Pinney asked. "I infer that Mr. Burgoyne sent you."

"No, sir," the Swede responded, blushing. "I yust kom for myself." He paused, breathing hard, pumping up energy. "I ban in New York 'most two years," he went on, with a desperate effort. "It's a wonder if I shouldn't learn something. Yes; oh, yes, I know a good thing when I see it. Do I speak plain enough?"

"A trifle of accent," Pinney responded, seeing that the question revealed a real difficulty which it would be possible to increase. "Naturally a pleasant voice, still clean, not yet offensively soiled by cosmopolitan contacts. I trust that the same may be predicated of your morals, but I am harassed by doubt."

Failing to understand any of this, Nielson was not flattered as to his English, but inspired with distrust, as Pinney had intended. For a few distressing moments the Swede's head was full of Swedish and nothing else. Doggedly he fought his way out from the shadow of Babel which had been cast upon him for his confusion.

"I saw you done it," he said slowly. "Look! Yust like this." Using his cap, he performed a highly illuminating pantomime representing Pinney passing the candy box into the taxicab, and Gleason did not fail to note that he was plainly indicated as the receiver. "I saw it by the glass"—indicating the position of the chauffeur's mirror, which gives a rearward view. "I thought it was a yoke, but now I know it was the pearls. Yes, oh, yes. And I get right on the yob."

His "yes, oh, yes" was a gem too rare to have been a native product of this soil. He must have got it of some blue-eyed, sweet-voiced girl from his own land.

"Pearls?" said Gleason, shaking his head. "What does the fellow mean?"

"I mean you got 'em," Nielson answered. "I saw you by the cab when we passed this house. You put

old tools in the box, and how you got him back in my car I lak to know."

Nobody enlightened him; nobody said anything. Nielson tried to break down the barrier by being generous with his own information. He told how the box had been opened at Mr. Saintsbury's and that Mr. Burgoyne was still there. Nielson had been "inwited" into the house and questioned. He repeated his chief answer, not without pride in it.

"I said it must have been done in the yeweler store. Oh, I got along good; not so hard as here. Mr. Burgoyne went out by the car with me, and slap me on the back of the shoulder. 'Good boy,' he said. 'I'll take care of you.' Well, I didn't tell him. I yust looked away and thought where I was—in New York. Everybody's doing it. He said, 'I won't let that old scorpion bite you.' Then he told me to call it a day's work, so I put up the car and kom here."

To these confidential disclosures neither Pinney nor Gleason made any response. They maintained a coolly receptive attitude, as if they were merely waiting for Nielson to express his full meaning. He supposed that he had done so. In an agony of nervousness he looked from one to the other of them vainly, and the sweat poured down his face.

"I ban thinking," he said at last. "You got the pearls, yes, but how for the money? Every pawnshop will know what they are."

Pinney nodded judicially, as if the point were well taken. Again an awful silence fell. Nielson mopped his forehead in the crook of his elbow.

"I bat you sell 'em back to Mr. Burgoyne," was his

final effort, and it seemed to be the point which had been especially in his view for some time.

Pinney glanced inquiringly at Gleason, who, after a slight pause, responded with a graceful but entirely meaningless gesture. At this, Nielson had a flash of temper which faded feebly. He was overwhelmed by a sense of failure, of inadequacy. The thing he had set himself to do was not natural to his blood; it was the result of cosmopolitan contacts—to borrow Pinney's phrase—a purely imitative performance, as when the barber's pet monkey tries to shave the cat.

"You can't do this sort of thing, my young friend," Pinney said; "and there's nothing in it, anyway, because you're wrong about the whole matter. As to the pearls, the truth is that Mr. Saintsbury is trying to hide them——"

"So as not to pay the tax," said Nielson. "Yes, sir. I heard about that in the car since quite a while."

"I suppose you know what our association is? It's like the police, but of a higher grade. We do things that the police can't do, such jobs as tracing these pearls. The State of New York has employed us to find them."

"I bat you find 'em and don't tell you got 'em," Nielson retorted, with unexpected spirit. "Yes, oh, yes. Yust like the police. What you call graft, and pretty big, too. Yes, oh, yes. I ban on to what they're worth."

He fumbled with the sweatband of his cap, and finally pulled out a folded bit of paper which fell from his nervous fingers. Pinney plucked it grace-

fully from the air before it was halfway to the floor, opened it, and beheld the following arithmetical calculation, worked out after laborious attempts and with several corrections in the final reading:

800) 4,000
5

5) 700,000
140,000

3) 140,000
46,666.66

"Ah," said Pinney, with a chill in his marrow, "I see. Very businesslike, I'm sure. But what is this first item?"

Under pressure, Nielson explained that he had heard of an automobile worth four thousand dollars which was stolen and sold for eight hundred—apparently the most successful transaction of the kind that had ever come to his knowledge. "Eight hundred dollars," he remarked, "is five times as less as four thousand."

Whence he had concluded that the Burgoyne pearls might sell for "five times as less" as their supposed value, and he had divided seven hundred thousand by five, and had got a hundred and forty thousand as the probable sale price to be shared by three partners

—one, two, three; he counted the gentlemen present, with voice and gesture, beginning with himself.

It appeared, therefore, that he had come to demand the modest sum of forty-six thousand six hundred and sixty-six dollars not to mention the odd cents.

Pinney rolled an eye toward Gleason, who made a warning sign. It was not safe to shatter so magnificent a dream. Pinney's plan had been to tell Nielson that the association was hunting for the pearls in the legitimate course of its business, and that what he had seen that afternoon was an unsuccessful attempt to get them. If he would preserve silence and assist in the search he should share the large reward offered by the State.

With so weak a stomach for crime the fellow might prefer honesty, even at greatly reduced terms, but he was not stupid enough to believe in any reward which could yield him a share worth mentioning in comparison with forty-six thousand dollars. His hopes were too high and too definite; he wouldn't stand the drop, even if it were possible to make him believe that the pearls were not in hand. Probably he would go soft and tell the whole story to Burgoyne through loyalty, perhaps affection. He had "yust looked away" when Burgoyne had patted him on the shoulder.

With this in mind, Pinney didn't dare to say that he hadn't the pearls, didn't dare attempt to hold the man by a promise based on an uncertainty. No admissions could increase the fatal force of the testi-

mony he was already prepared to give. A whisper of that story in the ears of Bill Harris would be enough.

Pinney tapped the paper softly with his finger.

"This is all right enough," he said. "You'll get your third, if you keep quiet and obey orders. Of course you understand that it will take several weeks to sell the pearls."

"Who you sell 'em to?" Nielson asked. He knuckled the sweat out of his mild blue eyes and stared at Pinney. "I bat you won't tell me; yes?"

"You win," responded Pinney. "I won't tell anybody. It wouldn't be fair to the customer."

"Does he live in New York?"

"Yes; I don't mind telling you that. He's right here."

Nielson seemed slightly relieved. "No use to go away, what you call skip," he said. "Mr. Burgoyne fix you all good with Mr. Saintsbury. I heard him. He said, 'I won't stand for Mr. Pinney to have trouble about this. I saw him all the time; every minute,' he said."

"Very kind of Mr. Burgoyne, I'm sure," said Pinney. "Unfortunately he couldn't say the same of yourself. After all, you had the best chance to get the pearls. You were alone with them in that car several times." The exact number was dissolved in mint julep, but Pinney was sure of the essential fact.

"Mr. Saintsbury don't know that," said Nielson. "Mr. Burgoyne put up a yob with me, outside, before he take me in. 'Say I don't leave the box in the car,' he told me. 'Say I carry it in every time

where I go.' Pretty good for me, I guess. I ban in some hole."

Here was something new and important. Nielson's former mention of the matter had not included any hint that Burgoyne had gone to the length of inventing a story for him and backing it with his own false testimony. It meant that Burgoyne was determined to save the two men who had been in the car with him.

Gleason perceived this, and was naturally curious to know what theory Burgoyne intended to advocate.

"Did Mr. Burgoyne say he thought the pearls were stolen at Seitz's?" he asked.

"No, sir," Nielson replied. "He says he looked in the box, down there, and they were all right."

"Where did you go before you took me aboard?" Pinney asked. "What did Mr. Burgoyne say about that to Mr. Saintsbury?"

Nielson answered that they had gone straight to Twenty-sixth Street. No one had spoken to Mr. Burgoyne or come up to the side of the car. That was the story told to Mr. Saintsbury, and it was the truth.

Deep fires burned in Jack Pinney's eyes as he listened to this recital, so accurately supporting his own convictions and desires. He flashed a lightning glance to Gleason, who looked bewildered. It was plain enough, of course, that Burgoyne was deliberately acquitting everybody except himself—which would be the natural behavior of a gentleman who had stolen seven hundred thousand dollars' worth of pearls—but while Pinney accepted the inference with-

out a moment's doubt, Gleason seemed unable to accept it at all.

"What did Mr. Saintsbury say to this?" he asked; but Nielson could not remember anything except questions. It was fairly clear that the lawyer had not expressed any strong opinion in Nielson's presence.

Pinney had got the information he was after, and he now read the Swede a brief and thrilling lecture on the dangers and the profits of his situation, even going through the rigmarole of setting all three names to the paper which bore the calculation of shares and swearing an oath over it. Nielson was so scared that his legs visibly trembled and he couldn't take his eyes off the breast of Pinney's coat after the fatal document had been pocketed therein.

"Now, my boy," said Pinney, "I guess that will be all for this evening. We will take care of you all right, but for the present you'd better not come to see us. It's too dangerous."

Nielson drew a deep, tremulous breath, and spread apart his feet as if to brace himself. He held his cap in his two hands, and it could be heard ripping with the tension.

"I want some money," he said. "Two thousand dollars, and I got to have him by Friday in the afternoon."

This sudden assault seemed to catch Pinney in the pit of the stomach. He had difficulty in finding breath to answer.

"Two thousand?" he said. "What do you mean?

This is Wednesday, man; we can't sell the pearls before Friday. You must wait."

"I can't," said Nielson. "I got to have it."

"In Heaven's name, what for?"

"I want to get married," said the Swede. "My girl go back home to Sweden Saturday, but not if I get that money. So I've got to have it. Only for that I wouldn't have done this. You bat, no; I—would—*not!*"

"But it won't take two thousand——"

"Yes, sir; it will. She said so."

He stuck to it. Nothing could move him. His girl had said she would marry him if he had two thousand dollars; but of course it would take him years to save as much as that, and she was going back to Sweden Saturday. Once there, she would marry somebody else.

Pinney argued in vain. He even offered to intercede with the lady, but Nielson wouldn't furnish him with the necessary particulars, declining to say further than that she was a manicure who had worked in a barber's shop. As indicating a sophisticated and mercenary young woman this was disheartening, and tended to support Nielson's story of his unhappy love now brightened by a sudden lurid flare of hope.

"I bat I get the money from Mr. Burgoyne, if I know how," said Nielson, and that settled it. A pistol under Pinney's nose would have been no more persuasive.

"All right, my son," said Pinney, with the best grace he could command, "if it's a love affair, I

guess we can't disappoint you. I'll see that you get the money."

New streams of sweat suddenly broke out on Nielson's face. Drops ran down the sides of his nose, so that he seemed to be weeping, but gradually a smile dawned over the broad, wet landscape of his countenance.

"Well," he said, "it's good I'm here, anyhow. Yes, sir. Twenty times I kom up to that door below outside and don't got the nerve to go in."

He was too nervous to manage his own exit, but Pinney did it for him. The door was shut, and for the second time that evening poor Jack leaned against it, too weak to get away. Gleason, tall and menacing, glared upon him from his place by the mantelpiece.

"Where do we get two thousand dollars by Friday?" he demanded. "Where do *you* get it, I ought to say? You let us in for this."

"You poor doll," Pinney rejoined, "do you think I'm ashamed of it? Why, Frank, we've got the pearls cinched. Holy's got 'em, and do you think I can't take 'em away from him? Then you don't know me. Cheer up, Brainless; I'll hang those pearls around your alabaster throat within three days. As for that Swede, he had to be paid, and, on the whole, it's better he should get his bit in cash. He'll never get any more, of course, and the two thousand will hold him safe as long as we need him."

"How do we get the money?" Gleason repeated.

"Oh, well," said Pinney, "we'll have to tap the

association's funds, after all. I'll think out a scheme right now if you'll keep quiet."

He began to pace the floor—the same man who had come to that room such a little while ago in the glory of a dazzling success, eager to undertake the division of a loot worth three quarters of a million, and now fallen to planning the unprofitable theft of a pitiful two thousand with which to buy a brief immunity from the consequences of failure.

Pinney did not know why it was now so hard for him to devise a plan for "getting by Bill Harris," but, in fact, about a half of his mind was occupied in holding a pose, in asserting that he was just as clever as he had thought himself to be, and that he had not yet lost his grip on the Burgoyne pearls. In these unfavorable conditions no practicable scheme for diverting the association's funds suggested itself. Even those which he had previously framed by way of mental exercise now violated natural probability like remembered dreams. Meanwhile, Gleason's eyes followed him with too much comprehension in their glance. Pinney resented it from an intellectual inferior.

"Don't stand there posing for your photograph," he said irritably. "This is easy enough. Let's go and get some dinner."

"All right, old boy," said Gleason amiably. "I say, don't take this thing so hard. Perhaps *I* can think it out."

Pinney stared at him, vaguely disquieted.

"You," he muttered. "I wonder if you really have a mind and if so, what's in it."

CHAPTER VI

IN DEFENSE

A WORD has been said about Jack Pinney's waste of vital power in trying to paint roses on the winter landscape of reality; but no such nonsense can be charged against Bill Harris. Optimism was his least fault. He had no vanity to support, no delusion of his own cleverness to sustain by falsifying the record. He knew himself to be a dull man.

Humility and apprehension walked downstairs with Bill, one on each side, like policemen having him in charge, as he went out to meet Mrs. Clarendon. She was a friend of Mr. Newcomb's, and in public a champion of the association, but Bill knew what she really thought. It had never entered into her head to imagine that any of Woodbury Newcomb's convicts were reformed; she preferred not to think so; they were more amusing in their natural state. Bill was perfectly aware of this, and so far as it related to himself he was not offended; but he could not fail to perceive that it might complicate the task of defending Pinney.

If Jack should be accused, it would be by far the worst danger that had ever threatened the association; and even without this element the case was bad enough. Bill had virtually accepted a retainer from the State, and the matter was in strict confidence.

He could not honorably mention it to anybody except his fellow officers. Mrs. Clarendon would ask him to act for the Burgoynes in secret. If he should do so, and the comptroller should learn of it, the association would stand to lose its charter. The alternative was to refuse a service to one of Mr. Newcomb's closest friends, without the right to explain the refusal. Here was a situation demanding precisely what Bill lacked, the cleverness of his distinguished patron now on the other side of the world.

Mrs. Clarendon had opened the door of the cab, and as Bill crossed the sidewalk he seemed to see her eyes shining in the dark. He was afraid of her, knowing that his wits were no match for hers. He knew her to be a very clever woman, though liable to error through levity, the absence of a serious view of life.

As a friend of Mr. Newcomb's, she might cover up a scandal which would hurt the association, but there was no limit to what she would ask of it in the way of illegality, as a favor to herself. No doubt she was a party to the tax dodging. How could Bill serve her and the State of New York and his own conscience at the same time, not to mention the desires of Mr. Newcomb, which he couldn't ascertain, and which he hadn't brains enough to discover by a process of reasoning?

"Good evening, Bill," she said, extending her hand.

"Please tell the man to drive up the Avenue till we stop him."

He gave the order, and got aboard. "Well, Bill,"

said the lady, "the Burgoyne pearls are missing, and our excellent friend, Jack Pinney, is very seriously implicated. Do you know anything about it?"

"I know he's an officer of our association," Bill responded. "I guess we can take care of him. Who brings this charge?"

"Now, Bill," she protested, "you mustn't treat me like an outsider. I'm a charter member of the association, and a very close friend of Woodbury Newcomb's—as you are well aware. I've come to you for help."

"None could be more welcome," said he, sorely puzzled. "Do you want me to help you get Jack out of this?"

"Jack Pinney is in no real danger," she replied. "He may seem to be, but he isn't. I give you my word for that."

"Then you know where the pearls are," said he.

"Yes, and I'm going to tell you, presently, in the strictest confidence, you understand."

"Don't do it," said Bill. "I better not know."

"I *wish* you to know." She spoke with gentle but decisive authority—supported by the fact that she was Woodbury Newcomb's very close friend—and the gooseflesh began to ripple over William Harris. He was retained by the comptroller—also a friend of Mr. Newcomb's—to find those pearls. If he passed his word to Mrs. Clarendon, how could he ever find them without seeming to violate her confidence? "I *wish* you to know," she repeated, "but you mustn't do anything about it."

She proceeded to bind him by every obligation of

professional and personal honor to regard what she should tell him as sacredly confidential. He attempted a partial promise, specifically excluding Mr. Saintsbury's attempt to dodge the tax, as being a matter of common knowledge. She trod across all his evasions with inimitable lightness; made the promise to suit herself, and expressed complete satisfaction with it.

The delicate, barely perceptible perfume of her presence began to stifle Bill. A kind of terror entered into his iron bosom. Yet all the while he was aware of something which appealed to his sympathy. There was an unaccustomed note in her voice affecting him like a sad scene in a play. Deep, deep down, there was something under this; and Bill strove in vain to think of any possible phase of the Burgoyne case which could account for it.

"Have you ever met Mr. Saintsbury?" she asked suddenly.

"I know him by sight," said Bill. "Also by reputation."

"I'm taking you to his house." She gave him an account of what had taken place there, including the story of the candy box as it had been extracted from Burgoyne and Anna. "Whether Mr. Saintsbury believes that Pinney took the pearls, I don't know," she went on. "I suggested it for my own purposes, being sure that it couldn't do any ultimate harm. It was partly a trick to get away and have this talk with you."

"And partly to throw Saintsbury," said Bill. "He was gettin' too warm. Is that right?"

"I can't be sure. He may not have seen an inch into it, but I was afraid he might. I don't want this case cleared, Bill; I want it muddled. It needs to be done just as you alone can do it, with that deadly, solemn shrewdness, impenetrable by mortal eye. Do this for my sake, and for the good of some one whom I very dearly wish to serve."

"Without tellin' me who's got the pearls——"

"But I'm *going* to tell you. The only point is that you mustn't let anybody know. You've promised that. You'll see the reason why it mustn't be done."

"What I *don't* see," said Bill, "is how to square Jack, if I don't locate those goods."

"Is it necessary to square him, right away?" she urged. "Of course you'll defend him, but can't you contrive to increase Mr. Saintsbury's suspicion, just for a day or two? We can explain it to Mr. Pinney, if you think that's essential."

Essential? Bill began to see nightmares in the cab He was being asked to throw his friend and fellow officer, "just for a day or two," in a case involving twenty years in jail, on the strength of Mrs. Clarendon's word that no harm would come of it. Bill turned his eyes toward her, wondering what could have hit her so hard.

"Let me explain the situation," said she. "Holy Burgoyne and his cousin are completely in Mr. Saintsbury's power. He drew their aunt's will, and the heirs are in the hollow of his hand. He never liked either of them; he despises their intelligence, and condemns every item of their conduct, yet he regards them as his children. They stand in the place

of a boy and girl that never lived, imaginary children of his own whom he would have ruled with a rod of iron. Well, you've seen them both, and you know what will happen when Mr. Saintsbury tries to regulate their behavior."

"Trouble," said Bill. "But he'll have to give 'em enough to live on. The courts'll interfere."

"Courts don't interfere with Oswald G. Saintsbury; he interferes with courts. Those two unfortunates have nothing but his death to hope for, and no law can save them. He'll ruin their lives—drive them to the wildest dissipation and folly. You know Holy quite well, I believe, and Anna is obviously so like him that a single glance is enough."

"I've thought of her," said Bill. "Often. Hopin' she'd do well in life."

"She *might* do well," Mrs. Clarendon responded, with a kind of bitterness. "She might marry a gentleman, and that's a rare and beautiful destiny—even if they have nothing to live on for a while."

"Meanin' Holy, I judge," said Bill.

"Yes; he loves her. He cares for nothing else in the world. He's loved her ever since she was a child, always with exquisite delicacy, with infinite sweetness and devotion; but without a ray of hope. It's been a fixed idea in his mind that she would never marry him, and he hasn't been quite strong enough to bear it as some of his friends would have wished. But at heart he is a very fine fellow, and I won't see him driven to the dogs if I can help it."

"Nor me," said Bill; "if I could do anything to prevent. Neither him nor any man."

"You *can* do something to prevent," said she. "You can keep Mr. Saintsbury from getting those pearls away from him. He has them."

Bill thought: "She's put it over on me now; what can I do? I'm into it up to my ankles, head-first. I might as well pull my feet under, so's to be in all over.

"Holy took 'em," he said. "What for?"

"To protect Anna."

"But you say she was after 'em herself. Why didn't he let her have 'em? They're hers."

"He's afraid of what she might do with them," said Mrs. Clarendon. "Anna is in love with somebody, and we don't know who it is. I can't find out, and yet I'm sure of the fact. It's a fair inference that there's some serious objection to the man. He may not even be single, though I believe he is—or, at least, that she thinks so. There are indications that she means to marry him, right away. She says she's not going to finish her college course; she seems to have abandoned all her former plans.

"Holy may know more about this than I do—he may even suspect who the man is. He won't discuss the subject. But it's certain that he knows *something,* and that he has taken the pearls from Anna because he's afraid she'll sell them and marry some impossible man, who'll squander the money or run away with it."

"Holy hasn't told you this? You're backin' him in the dark?"

"Yes, I am," she said. "Whatever he means to do, I wish him to succeed, and not be beaten by Mr.

Saintsbury. I know what the result would be. Do you suppose he isn't wretched enough now, looking back upon his recklessness and wasted years, and buried in a mass of debts? But he never thought Anna would need money—he knew she'd inherit plenty, and he didn't count on Oswald G. Saintsbury. If he succeeds in saving Anna now, it may regenerate him, steady him upon the true foundation of his character. I hope so, very, very earnestly."

It had been in Bill's mind to say that responsibility hadn't steadied Holy much that afternoon, but the tone in which Mrs. Clarendon uttered the last few words repressed the criticism; and Bill was silent, meditating on the strange possibilities of romance, a subject very far out of his line.

"You are blaming me for bringing Jack Pinney into this affair," she said; "but I didn't do it; he was there already. I merely turned attention to him at the psychological moment, to gain time and create confusion. That's politics; that's diplomacy. Now that I have served my own ends, I retire, leaving the result of my policies as an inheritance for my successor, who is yourself. There is my confession. Now, what are you going to do?"

Bill expressed the luminous opinion that the only thing to do was to block Saintsbury, somehow.

"He'll put it flat up to me to find the pearls."

"Certainly," said she. "That's precisely what we want him to do. I suggested it. I saw in a flash that I could talk with you first and arrange everything."

If there was anything that she hadn't arranged,

Bill would have liked to know what it was. So far as he could see, she had put him in a perfectly impossible situation. In a sense he was tied with cobwebs, and gagged with a promise that had never been in his own mouth; and yet he was forced to recognize that he would never have believed that Holy Burgoyne had taken the pearls for his private advantage, and would probably have missed the real motive in the case and gone altogether astray, without the help of Mrs. Clarendon's explanation. The lady's confidence had been forced upon him, yet he couldn't turn it back.

After a period of fruitless cogitation, he suggested that Mr. Saintsbury had been concealing the pearls with intent to defraud the State, but it was a poor card to draw—in which opinion Mrs. Clarendon decisively concurred.

"Mr. Saintsbury isn't ashamed of trying to evade an inheritance tax," she reminded him; "he's proud of it. That's the reason why he does it. All the best people dodge their taxes, in one way or another, and the rabble howls—a sweeter music in Mr. Saintsbury's ears than the heavenly chorus will be, unless it's more select than now seems probable. What you must do is something original and unexpected. Make him ridiculous, if possible. Ridicule is the one thing he can't stand."

Bill went to the cupboard of his originality and found it bare. He was driven to imitation—trying to think what Mr. Newcomb would do in the same circumstances.

Meanwhile the cab was at a standstill. It had gone

up the Avenue at a snail's pace, and for several minutes had been held below Forty-eighth Street. Bill became aware of the lights of a restaurant and they offered him the convenience of a telephone which fitted into a plan he was chiseling and grinding in his mind.

He inquired of Mrs. Clarendon whether the paste duplicate of the Burgoyne pearls was still at Seitz's. Yes; she supposed so.

"I want to see it," said he. "Maybe Rhinehart'll get it out for me to-night. He lives close to the store."

He excused himself to telephone for this purpose, and, upon returning, he informed her that he had been successful. Rhinehart would get the paste pearls, and meet him within half an hour. Would Mrs. Clarendon mind going a little way downtown before they called on Mr. Saintsbury?

Not at all; she would go anywhere and do anything to further the designs of Mr. Harris. What were they?

He pondered upon this request, and finally begged the lady's pardon. There were reasons why he'd rather not tell.

When she urged her desire to assist, he begged her to go over for him again the scene at Mr. Saintsbury's—all that had been said and done.

The cab stopped before a quiet old residence which had been transformed for bachelor lodgings. Across the second story was a balcony; and, remembering that item in descriptions given by Mr. Newcomb, the lady seemed to recognize Bill's home. She supposed

that Mr. Rhinehart was expected; he could hardly have arrived already, and, while she waited in the cab, she watched for him, but in vain.

The interval may have been about ten minutes, and, when Bill rejoined her, he seemed to have a more decided manner. His raincoat was buttoned to the chin, but she supposed that his working clothes were under it, the plain, dark, inconspicuous attire which had often appealed agreeably to her imagination, suggesting grim adventures in his former sinful trade.

He gave Mr. Saintsbury's address to the cabman. So the game went on, and Mrs. Clarendon wished that she knew the nature of it, but the demeanor of her companion, though courteous, was not encouraging to curiosity.

Lights were on in Mr. Saintsbury's drawing-room, and from the hall, when the watching butler had admitted them without a ring, they heard voices and a sudden shrill titter such as might have come from a nervous schoolgirl.

"Rhinehart," Mrs. Clarendon whispered. "Did you know he was coming here?"

"He said he would," Bill responded, staring at the base of the wall from beyond which came the voice of Saintsbury, saying:

"The ingenuity of thieves does not amuse me, Mr. Rhinehart, but I grant your expert knowledge of the subject. The case against this fellow Pinney is now complete; and I have to thank you for helping me to close the only loophole which seemed to offer him the slightest chance of escape."

Bill's chin came slowly round in a rising curve till Mrs. Clarendon was aware of one pale, gray eye regarding her. She sent back a reassuring glance, and her expressive countenance dismissed Rhinehart and all his theories with contempt. The gray eye seemed satisfied, and its gaze was withdrawn.

"Why, of course," Rhinehart was saying, "but you mustn't be too sharp with Harris. Give him time, reasonable time. The pearls aren't in Pinney's pocket, you know. They're well hidden, long before this."

CHAPTER VII

AN EX-BURGLAR'S TRICK

MRS. CLARENDON stepped to the door and saw Mr. Saintsbury's back, as he stood in the attitude of a lawyer examining a witness. Rhinehart sat before him, smooth and sleek, his odd snout of nose pointing upward, his round eyes shining with a shrewdness not altogether human. He looked like a clothed pig in a picture illustrating a fairy tale. On his plump knees he held a satchel, presumably containing the counterfeit presentment of the Burgoyne pearls. The candy box with its accessories, in the nature of Exhibit A, was displayed on a chair beside him.

Seeing the lady on the threshold, Rhinehart scrambled to his feet. Saintsbury wheeled about, and his first glance fell fair upon Bill Harris darkening the doorway with the incomparable gloom of his presence. There was a perceptible shock, as if the lawyer had stopped short to avoid collision with a solid object.

Of Bill's solidity there could be no doubt. The frock coat which he now wore, dead black, and ample in the chest and shoulders, served to enhance not only his weight in pounds but even more that gravity of mind which was the delight of his appreciative friends. This was not the attire of usual business

which Mrs. Clarendon had expected, but she viewed it with extreme approval. What lines he had prepared himself to speak in the forthcoming scene she did not know, but she felt that he was dressed for the part.

"Mr. Saintsbury," said she, "this is the friend I have so often praised to you, but never enough, Mr. Harris, manager of our association."

"Hum!" Saintsbury muttered. "So this is the man. Harris, eh? Hum!"

"How do you do?" Bill seemed to be addressing the candy box, from which his gaze had never wandered for an instant.

Rhinehart looked helplessly across at Mrs. Clarendon as if Bill's eye were a gun whose line of fire it would be dangerous to meet. She sent him a word of greeting, accompanied by that indulgent smile which women bestow on men who are odd enough in their appearance to be interesting. Burgoyne strolled in, having got tired of the study, where he had been left alone while Saintsbury had private speech with Rhinehart.

Holy walked toward Bill, intending to shake hands, but the lawyer interposed.

"Oblige me by shutting that door," he said irritably; "and then sit down, and keep still. Be seated, all of you."

Bill went straight to Exhibit A and gathered it up; not visibly attending to any other matter, but it might have been observed that he did not precede Mrs. Clarendon in sitting down. Saintsbury remained standing.

"Harris," said he, "this so-called association, of which you are supposed to be the manager, provides you with a living, and no doubt with opportunities for profit more or less legitimate. I assume that you are interested in its continuance."

"Deeply," Bill responded, in a tone which carried the word down to new depths of meaning.

"My own view is that it has become a nuisance, and ought to be suppressed," Saintsbury continued. "While Mr. Newcomb actively concerned himself with it, I was inclined to be tolerant. He was to some extent a popular figure, but his attitude toward the rights of property was always commendable. I have valued his acquaintance; and, because his name is still connected with the association, I have delayed reporting to the police the theft of the Burgoyne pearls. Mrs. Clarendon will have informed you—if you didn't know it already—that the pearls were stolen by an associate of yours, one Pinney. There is no doubt as to the facts. What have you to say?"

Considering Bill's predicament and the real nature of the information she had given him, Mrs. Clarendon waited anxiously for his reply.

"The facts as stated," said he, "put nothin' on Mr. Pinney. They bear against another party."

Rhinehart struck in on high C:

"Perhaps Mrs. Clarendon didn't explain——" But Saintsbury squelched him with a peremptory gesture.

"Harris, if you attempt defenses and evasions, you and this Pinney will go to jail together." There was the shadow of a twenty years' sentence under the

lawyer's menacing hand. "I suspect that you are already his accomplice in the eye of the law. Where were you when Mrs. Clarendon found you?"

Bill had taken a square of tissue paper out of the candy box and had spread it on the floor, between his feet. He delayed his reply until he had placed upon the paper, in exact spacing, the three old tools with which the box had been weighted.

"At the residence of Mr. Pinney and Mr. Gleason," he said; "on business."

"Relating to the Burgoyne pearls, I suppose," the lawyer said, with a sneer.

Precisely; but Bill could not admit it.

"The nature of the business," said he, "is confidential."

"That sort of business usually is," Saintsbury retorted. "It appears, however, that you have conferred with Pinney since the crime. I shall assume that whatever defense you may try to offer was prepared at that conference."

"No, sir," said Bill; "it was done later. By me."

Saintsbury went to the little stand that held the telephone, and set it out into the room to the limit of the wire, which was quite long. Bill knew what was coming, but he did not raise an eye, continuing to study the tools on the floor.

Fingering the telephone in a vain attempt to attract attention, Saintsbury glared at the top of Bill's head, a solid roof, well thatched.

"In view of your attitude, it seems necessary to report this case to the police," said the lawyer.

The bluff was too obvious, and Bill remained un-

moved. He knew what Saintsbury wanted; and reporting the case to the police was not the way to get it.

"How did the pearls come to be at Rhinehart's place?" Bill inquired, apparently of the wrench, which he carefully straightened with his toe. "I heard they were missin'."

Saintsbury took this to be a threat based on the matter of the tax. He had expected it, and was far from desiring to avoid or postpone the issue. He had a story all prepared to meet it.

"It is common knowledge," he said, "that the pearls were stolen from Mrs. Harriet Burgoyne's sleeping room, shortly before her death. Her butler was suspected, but a detective agency failed to secure evidence against him or to recover the property. The vigilance of the detectives and the wakefulness of nurses and servants during Mrs. Burgoyne's illness prevented the thief from making away with the pearls which he had hidden in the house. He was discharged, with the others, when the house was closed, and, a few days later, he became alarmed, and fled."

"All the servants are dispersed, nobody knows where," Mrs. Clarendon said, by way of warning to Bill. "There's only the housekeeper, an elderly person of extreme discretion."

"Now entirely devoted to Mr. Saintsbury," Burgoyne remarked.

"If you desire to testify," said the lawyer, "you may tell us what you know about this matter."

"Nothing," Holy replied; "nor any of the others. All hearsay; incompetent, irrelevant, and immaterial."

"A surprisingly intelligent reply," said Saintsbury. "To proceed——"

"The goods were found where the butler hid 'em, I suppose," said Bill.

"Three days ago," Saintsbury responded, not caring how this story was received, so long as its legal value was admitted. "The housekeeper found them, and informed me. I directed Mr. Rhinehart to get the pearls and examine them to see that they were intact. Yesterday he mentioned to Mr. Burgoyne that he had finished his examination, and it was arranged that Mr. Burgoyne should bring the jewels here."

"In this?" said Bill, looking downward into the candy box.

"The casket in which they were formerly kept has disappeared," Saintsbury said, with undisturbed gravity. "I believe there was some idea of prudence in using the candy box, as offering no temptation to thieves. The penetrative genius of a Pinney seems to have been undervalued, even by persons who consort with him." The lawyer cast a withering glance upon Burgoyne.

Defiance was among the most natural and easy of Burgoyne's mental states, yet he returned Saintsbury's glance in such a way as to mark with a fine delicacy the difference in their years.

"I consorted with Mr. Pinney this afternoon so intimately," he said, "as to assert with confidence that he didn't know what was in that box, did not

concern himself with it, had no chance to take anything out of it, and less than none to collect the mess of rubbish subsequently found inside it. To accuse him of this robbery is to revive the Salem witchcraft. There's the meat of my testimony, Mr. Harris."

"Your testimony is negative; it consists of what you didn't see," said Saintsbury; "and your condition at the time amply accounts for visual deficiencies. I do not assert, of course, that a single person situated as Pinney was could have committed this crime. Indeed, the one outstanding fact is that the thief must have had an accomplice. The box was abstracted, emptied, weighted, and restored to the car. This shows intent to delay the discovery of the theft in the interest of some persons so placed as to be naturally under suspicion, one who could not escape immediately upon commission of the crime. The person to be protected was Pinney, and no one else."

"Why not Nielson?" Mrs. Clarendon interposed, still bent on making confusion. "Of course, I haven't the least idea that he did it, but he seems to meet your requirements."

"Indeed?" Saintsbury rejoined. "Will you be good enough to tell me how Nielson, in the chauffeur's seat, could have got hold of this box and passed it out to an accomplice? Mr. Burgoyne says that Nielson was always in his place when the box was in the car."

"When did you put the top up, Holy?" she asked.

"I beg pardon?" Burgoyne had been watching

Bill's study of the tools on the floor, and had become hypnotized by the fascination of that spectacle.

"We were on Forty-fifth Street, I think, near the Avenue."

Saintsbury pounced on this in an instant.

"On Forty-fifth Street, were you? That's where this Pinney lives—with another member of the gang. What's his name? Harris mentioned it."

"Frank Gleason," said Rhinehart.

"Gleason; yes, that's the man. And you halted close to the place where these rascals live."

"I can't be sure," said Burgoyne. "It might have been almost any other street."

Saintsbury turned to Rhinehart:

"You were telling me that these fellows have a way of telegraphing with their hands."

"Perfectly wonderful," said Rhinehart. "I've seen it done. A man of Pinney's caliber could send a chapter of the Old Testament and never miss a punctuation mark. If Gleason had been in sight, Pinney could have told him all that was necessary, in less time than you'd think possible. But even if Gleason has an alibi, that won't matter. Jack Pinney knows every first-rate crook in the world. Think of that route! The Avenue, Broadway, Longacre Square—it fairly swarms with them. Pinney must have seen dozens."

"Quite possible," Saintsbury assented; "but I think we needn't look beyond Gleason. If the man had an alibi, we should be hearing from Harris on the subject. He knows where Gleason was."

What Bill knew on this point was not reassuring,

nor of any value in the present controversy. Gleason might have been in his rooms when Holy's car went by, or just outside, on the way to keep his appointment with Pinney. In the latter case he would have had a cab; he rarely walked when in dress; but Bill suspected that the cabman would have been Ike Feinburg, the escaped man, who would commit suicide rather than attract the attention of the police as a witness in such a case. The chances were against Gleason's having any alibi.

In regard to the ultimate truth, Bill banked on a double guarantee in Mrs. Clarendon's assurance that Burgoyne had the pearls, and in his own solid conviction that Pinney did not have them. Bill felt that he could trust Pinney, after having seen him; he would have looked very different if he had just won a stake worth seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars.

Luck, however, was helping Saintsbury to make out a dangerous case, and Bill was debarred from the one sure defense, the finding of the pearls.

"There's no question of alibis," he said, "nor accomplices. The job, as I see it, was done by one man."

He swung slowly toward Rhinehart, who shrank away.

"I hope you understand, Mr. Harris, that I'm not antagonizing you in this matter," he said anxiously. "I know how you're situated. You're trying to drive a team of untrained zebras, and they've kicked over the traces. By the way, did any one explain to

you that Mr. Burgoyne examined the pearls, after I gave them to him?"

"I know what took place," said Bill. "I'll trouble you for the paste set, if you please."

Rhinehart complied, Saintsbury not objecting, and the paste duplicate was given to Bill. Like the original, it was in three parts, now separate and each protected with raw cotton and wrapped in tissue. Bill carefully put them into the box, and adjusted the cover and the external paper.

"Where's the string?" said he.

"I think you're sitting on it," Rhinehart squealed; but Bill disproved the allegation by rising.

"Maybe it was dropped when the box was opened," Bill suggested, walking toward the small table on the far side of the room.

Saintsbury took one step after him, and seemed about to speak; then halted and stood watching with the others while Bill searched for the string and found it under the table. Walking slowly back again, he kept his gaze fixed steadily on Rhinehart, who sat on the edge of a chair, his round eyes boring holes in the atmosphere, and his sharp nose sniffing for mischief.

Saintsbury looked from one to the other of these men, and seemed puzzled. Any attack on Rhinehart would be based on his reputation for dealing in stolen jewels. It was probable that Harris had knowledge of such transactions; he might even have been a party to one of them. By accusing Rhinehart, though on the weakest grounds, he might hope to scare him into using his influence

to suppress the charge against Pinney. Knowing how strong was his own hold on the gem expert, Saintsbury felt no apprehension. A cold grin spread through the folds and furrows of his shrunken cheeks.

"Before showing how this trick was done," said Bill, "I'll ask Mr. Saintsbury to tie up the box. In the interests of fairness."

The lawyer had seen clever tricks done with documents and letters; he had devised not a few himself, with excellent results. Moreover, he had his share of that human vanity which feels itself superior to deception, even in the face of age-long proof that we were all born to be tricked. His peculiar grin was very much in evidence as he took the box, and, setting it on the telephone stand, began carefully to tie it up.

"There's one point," said Bill; "if the real pearls are not found, does the tax have to be paid?"

Saintsbury paused, holding the string under his thumb.

"The tax is on the transfer to an heir," he said. "There is no Pinney named in the will."

Bill nodded gravely.

"The estate," said he, "might be settled without the pearls. Or it might not. I can see a chance for lawsuits, delayin' the whole game."

"What do you mean?" Saintsbury straightened up, with one long finger on the box, steadying it. Not only the finger but the arm trembled, and there was a quiver of rage in his voice.

"Harris," said he, "I'll talk with you alone. Mr.

Rhinehart, you'll wait for me in my study. Mrs. Clarendon, I shall ask you to return to your hotel, and bring Anna here. Mr. Burgoyne will accompany you."

"Excuse me," said Bill; "I want these witnesses to——"

"Go, I tell you!" And Saintsbury waved both arms.

The box balanced itself on the edge of the stand, shivered for a second, as if in the draft from Saintsbury's arms, and then fell over, spilling its contents to the peril of Saintsbury's toes; for the box held only hardware, as on the previous occasion, but now of a superior quality, fine tools, in fact, and fresh from the extensive collection of William Harris. He had chosen a few for this particular purpose when he changed his clothes.

Bill took the imitation pearls from the breast of his coat, loose like Saintsbury's, and, with an inner pocket on each side.

"Showin'," said he, "how the trick could 'a' been turned by one man, right in this room."

Nobody had told Rhinehart that Saintsbury had opened the box with any circumstances of privacy when it was brought to the house, but he guessed it now. Sudden and immense relief at seeing some one else the victim of the joke increased the force with which it smote Rhinehart in those nervous centers where his well-known weakness resided. He sent forth a hysterical squeal of laughter, and the awfulness of Saintsbury's countenance merely incited him to fresh spasms.

If anything could have aggravated Saintsbury's rage it would have been that idiotic laugh. He thrust out a trembling and contorted hand toward Bill.

"Jailbird!" he gasped. "Confirmed, damnable lawbreaker——"

He paused, choking; and at that instant the bell rang, its sudden sound exciting Rhinehart to a fresh outburst.

"Confirmed, damnable lawbreaker!" Saintsbury repeated, and seized the instrument from the stand. "Get off the wire!" he yelled. "I don't care who you are——" But the voice coming along the wire repeated a name, and Saintsbury realized, despite his wrath, that here was something which should be heard, something pertinent to the matter in hand.

For the person calling was a spy, a lawyer named Northcliff, who was engaged as special counsel in a case which gave him access to the comptroller's office, and especially to affairs relating to the inheritance tax. It was a good little plum for a lawyer of that size, and he owed it to the influence of Saintsbury, who had told him to keep his eyes and ears open by way of gratitude.

Bill Harris had an ear which was peculiarly open, and had once been famous. He was reputed to be able to hear the mechanism of a safe's lock when it made no noise at all. Saintsbury's telephone was of the more reticent sort, and what it said was audible only to the immediate listener—and to Bill.

"I've heard news about a certain matter," said Northcliff. "An official whom we will call 'C' has

decided to investigate, through Woodbury Newcomb's association. Do you know those people?"

Saintsbury managed to swallow his natural reply, fortunately for Mrs. Clarendon.

"Yes," said he.

"They're on the job, or will be," Northcliff proceeded. "I overheard a few words, and got a copy of a very private telegram. Harris is the man to look out for—Bill Harris, the ex-safe-breaker. C may have consulted him this evening. I can give you a description of Harris if——"

"I don't want it," Saintsbury barked, but it was his last exhibition of temper. Obviously he must secure a stronger grip on Harris. That heavy-witted, dismal, dangerous figure of a pirate must be noosed, with all his crew, and forced into obedience on pain of extermination.

Saintsbury hung up the receiver, and surveyed his guests.

"You are all here still, I perceive," said he, and with that there was a general movement.

Bill gave the paste pearls to Rhinehart, who made a considerable detour to pass Saintsbury at a safe distance. Mrs. Clarendon offered Bill her hand; she looked excited, and he judged that she was pleased with what he had done. She whispered, "Wait for me on the doorstep."

CHAPTER VIII

A TRUCE

SAINTSBURY shut the door behind Mrs. Clarendon, and advanced upon Bill with cold murder in his eye.

"You haven't the intelligence for this," he said. "Who put you up to it? Have you had legal advice?"

"Not in many a day," said Bill gravely.

"I believe you've been legally advised since this crime," Saintsbury insisted. "What did you mean by those questions relative to the tax? Out with it. If they were your own questions, let me hear you explain them."

Bill knew that he must state his case, plainly and fully, but he strove hard to avoid unnecessary offense.

"There's two views of everything," he said. "Dodgin' this tax ain't a wrong—not as you see it. It's a matter o' conscience; as Mr. Newcomb might say, an article o' religion. Very good. You mean to dodge it all, not the tax on the pearls alone. You didn't want the State to swallow that first robbery. You've let gossip leak out, bein' careful only that there wasn't legal evidence. Havin' got the State stirred up in the matter, it was time to cut loose from witnesses. Especially Rhinehart.

"Nobody was to be in on this second disappearance of the pearls except yourself. You alone was to know what had become of 'em. Result, a legal muddle. There'll be a lawsuit over the tax. You might get yourself sued by Miss Holden and other heirs. The Burgoyne estate won't be settled in your lifetime, an' you'll go to your grave not havin' paid a tax under a law that seems to you a wrong."

It was by far the longest speech in Bill's career; he was astounded at his own loquacity, but even more at the way in which his effort was received. Saintsbury stretched out an arm and laid his long, cold fingers on Bill's forehead, pushing back the hair.

"You have more room here than I supposed," he said, withdrawing the hand. "I am encouraged. My first impression was that you were behaving with the dull obstinacy of a criminal, and that you 'stood in' with Pinney, as the phrase is. I have changed my opinion, and now believe that you are ignorant of the truth. When you are convinced of it, you will meet my terms. You have the rudiments of a solid, logical mind, which will never permit you to defend this Pinney, still less to become his partner in a crime so foolish, reckless, and drunken."

"Mr. Pinney in this case is an accident," said Bill. "It was all framed up before he got in or was thought of. As it stands now, there's no evidence against him."

"I thought I mentioned to you that there was an eyewitness," Saintsbury rejoined. "To be frank with you, the man has not yet told me the truth, but he will. I examined him, and let him lie to me, but,

when he left this house, I had him followed, making the arrangements by telephone, without disclosing the nature of the case. Just before you arrived, the detective called me up, according to instructions.

"My witness had gone from here to Forty-fifth Street, looking for blackmail, as I had anticipated, and as I deliberately gave him the opportunity to do so. I've no doubt that Pinney bought him off, but let me assure you that the man will not stay bought. Before this evening is over, I shall have the whole truth out of him, including the negotiations with Pinney. I give you this information for your assistance in dealing with the thief. You will tell Pinney, also, that he cannot escape. I have taken adequate measures to prevent it, but my agents do not know why I am having him watched."

Second-rate men from a detective agency shadowing Jack Pinney! In a happier moment, Bill might have smiled.

"Mr. Saintsbury," said he, "if all this is straight, you don't know where the goods are. You want me to get 'em. An' say nothin'."

"Precisely."

"If I don't get 'em, you'll squeeze me harder an' harder. If I blow your game, you'll call in the police. You'll be after the pearls, the same as myself, an' as likely to find 'em, if not more so. If you find 'em, you'll keep quiet, an' push the case against Pinney. To cover yourself."

"I'll do worse," said Saintsbury, with his cold grin. "I'll convict him, and as many more of you as I can bring into it. There won't be much left of

your association, Harris, when I'm through. Such being the fact, I suggest that you give me your promise *not* to blow my game, as you so elegantly express it."

Bill was in doubt as to what his opponent really believed. He might suspect Burgoyne and intend to force Bill to take the pearls away from him by crooked means. On the other hand, the story of the eyewitness had the sound of truth. Bill guessed who this man was. He did not know Nielson, but he had heard him described; and he now recalled that, when crossing from Pinney's house to Mrs. Clarendon's cab, he had seen a Swede, in chauffeur's dress, loitering near by.

"I am told you have one virtue, such as it is," said Saintsbury. "You hold to your word. Give it to me now."

Bill knew that Saintsbury was trying to find out whether he had yet been approached by the comptroller, and to prevent his taking the case, if that were still possible. But Northcliff would probably discover the truth within a few hours, and a denial this evening would merely result in a worse explosion to-morrow.

"Mr. Saintsbury," he said, "I heard every word that came over that telephone. The telegram your friend stole a copy of, is in my vest pocket."

For an instant the lawyer was threatened with another access of blind fury, but he mastered it.

"You've been retained by the comptroller, have you?" said he. "Well, what if you have?"

"He must be dealt with honorable."

"You blockhead!" Saintsbury yelped. "You don't have to ruin yourself on that account. Give up the case, and send back your retainer. If you stick for honor, that's honorable."

"It looks to me like bein' bought up by the other side." Bill set himself moving toward the door. "The association don't do it."

"Hold on, there!" Saintsbury commanded, and Bill came to a halt. "This is mere suicide on your part. Take time to think."

"I have to," said Bill. "No man thinks slower. If *you* want time, Mr. Saintsbury, you'll have no opposition from me."

"A truce, eh? On what terms?"

"You to make no charge against Mr. Pinney," Bill replied. "No open attack on the association. Me to keep quiet as you desire. This stand-off to continue till Saturday, at the close of business, five p. m. New terms to be made at that time."

Saintsbury pretended to weigh this proposal; but, in fact, he weighed the man, recalling what Newcomb and Mrs. Clarendon had said of his peculiar, dogged fidelity to his word. As to the terms, they were entirely satisfactory. Long before the hour set in this agreement, Harris would be sewn up in a sack.

From Bill's point of view it was the best that he could offer. The time was short, but he had stretched it to the limit; for he was under engagement to dine with the comptroller at six thirty.

"Saturday, at five o'clock," said Saintsbury; "and, in the meantime, no talking."

"Nobody will get nothin' from me while this deal holds," Bill responded.

"I wish you good evening," said the old man, and Bill returned the words an octave lower. Saintsbury escorted him to the outer door, and then went rearward to the study where Rhinehart waited.

The night had turned fair, and Saintsbury's doorstep was already drying in a fresh west wind. Strict discipline was a rule of life with Bill, and Mrs. Clarendon had specifically mentioned the doorstep. Embarrassment might result if Saintsbury or even Rhinehart should come out and find him there, but he had barely begun to think upon this point, when the door was softly opened. Over his shoulder he saw Mrs. Clarendon, who signaled for caution, and beckoned him to enter.

"I sent Holy off alone," she whispered, taking him by the arm. "I hid upstairs, so that I could let you in——" hurrying him along with her into the drawing-room. "Oh, Bill, you were wonderful! How did you ever think it out?"

"I was obliged to," said Bill. "I had to put it on somebody."

"Did he admit anything? Did he try to make any bargain with you?"

"I got a stand-off till Saturday," said he. "After that it'll be war."

By this time they had come to the far end of the drawing-room.

"There'll be no war if we can find the pearls," said she. "We can, unless he's taken them away."

"Mr. Saintsbury?" said Bill, confused. "You

mean he really got 'em? 'Tain't possible. He wouldn't have let me go through with the trick."

"He came mighty near stopping you," she said. "He started after you, and then stood, watching. If you'd done what he was afraid of, he'd have stopped you fast enough, but when you didn't do it, he was tricked; the more easily because he was looking for something else. He didn't put the pearls into his pockets, as you did;; I don't believe he's clever enough for that. He put them into a drawer of this table."

It was a very old mahogany piece, with two leaves at the sides. There was a shallow drawer in the front, about six inches below the top. It was unlocked and empty save for ancient rubbish of yellowed envelopes, old pencils and penholders, and even two or three quills.

"Not that one," she said. "The upper part's a drawer, too. It works with a spring. Can you open it?"

"You mean," Bill said, "that Mr. Saintsbury had the weights here. When makin' the shift he took 'em out and put the pearls in."

"Yes, I think so. Why did he go straight to this table when he opened the box? He'd told Holy to bring the pearls here; he might have had everything prepared. I remember just how he stood, with that queer coat spread out like the the black wings of Old Harry. We couldn't see what he was doing, and he knew it. He could play it on all of us just as well as on Holy alone, as he'd expected."

Bill chewed the cud of meditation. He was not cheered by hope, but saddened by disappointment.

"You said Mr. Burgoyne had 'em," he remarked, not in the way of reproach. "He hadn't given you a hint?"

"No, but I thought he had them, and perhaps he has. I want to find out."

"I guess that's what everybody wants," said Bill, running his hand along the front of the table. "There's desires an' there's opinions. But I got yet to strike one solid fact."

At that the secret drawer sprang open noiselessly. In the middle of it there lay an object wrapped in white tissue paper and of the size and shape suitable to excite the most flattering expectations. The lady pounced upon it with a little cry, followed by another in a very different tone as she dropped it.

Bill took the thing out, and found it to be a white bag, tied with a string, and filled with a substance that felt sandy and a little sticky through the cloth.

"What in the world is it?" said the lady.

"In the world as it goes," said Bill, "it's the proof of Mr. Saintsbury's innocence. He was all ready, but he didn't get the chance."

He untied the string and tested the bag's contents.

"Granulated sugar," he said. "No good as evidence. Too easy to get. I call it an improvement over the tools. Not so likely to get loose an' rattle, though that didn't matter, the way he meant to play it."

She was convulsed with sudden laughter, barely controlled.

"Think of him when he opened that box. Oh, lovely! I wonder he didn't rave."

"I suppose the Burgoyne housekeeper made the bag," said Bill. "Perfectly safe."

He wrapped up the bag as before, restored it to its former place, and closed the drawer.

"I'm glad Holy got ahead of him," said the lady. "We're sure of that now, of course." She waited for his assent, which didn't come. "You don't think it's possible that Jack Pinney got them, do you?"

"No," said Bill, "but he'll be arrested for it Saturday evening. I can't hold Saintsbury longer."

"Couldn't you do something with that bag? You'd better take it."

"No," said he. "You don't want me to. On the final show-down you might have to testify."

"In public? Oh, I couldn't! It's rank cowardice, I know; but he's my trustee, with power to reinvest my property and cut the income down, and I can't live on it even as it is. I don't dare quarrel with him."

"I'll make Holy do something," she added, drawing closer and speaking more softly, as they walked toward the door. "Nobody can scare *him,* except Anna—and there's the noose again. If I persuade Holy to tell you the truth, what can you promise him?"

"Whatever's left," said he gently, "if there is anything. As to his havin' the pearls, I can't be more bound than what I am now."

Conversation ceased as they escaped through the hall, but when they were free of the house she assured him again that she would use her influence with Burgoyne at once. He was waiting for her

with Anna at the hotel; she would have a private word with him before their return to Mr. Saintsbury's. Bill would walk with her to the Plaza, of course, and she would tell him the state of Holy's mind as soon as she had ascertained it. Holy would never let any harm come to Jack Pinney or the association as a result of this affair; that is, he wouldn't mean to do so, but he might try to accomplish their salvation in his own way. It seemed to her that Holy had marked out a course from which it would be very hard to turn him. No living man was more obstinate or more capable of hanging on till the last dog was dead.

That was precisely Bill's opinion, and the quaint, laborious alchemy of his mind was not able to extract any comfort out of it. He credited Holy with the most gentlemanly intentions, and with no prudence whatever. If he had the pearls, he would hang on too long; but there was no certainty that he had them.

At the Plaza, Mrs. Clarendon did not find the cousins in the reception room, where they should have been, but this was not surprising, as Anna might very probably have refused to come down.

"We'll go up," said the lady. "They're in my sitting room, I suppose." But they weren't. The maid was there, alone. Miss Holden had not come back after going out with Mrs. Clarendon early in the evening. Mr. Burgoyne had not called; there had been no inquiry for either of the ladies. The office verified this report. Mr. Burgoyne and Miss Holden were paged without success. Unconvinced, Mrs.

Clarendon descended, and with Bill's assistance made a thorough search, in vain.

Bill suggested that Burgoyne and Miss Holden might have met accidentally, at some entrance of the hotel, and have gone to Mr. Saintsbury's or elsewhere. He knew better, and so did Mrs. Clarendon.

"Holy would never have subjected me to this anxiety," she said. "I'd give ten years of my life to know where Anna is."

"Perhaps Mr. Burgoyne knows, and has gone to get her."

"He thought she was here," Mrs. Clarendon rejoined positively. "How did he find out that she wasn't? And why doesn't he send me word?"

"He may," said Bill, "any minute. But we ought not to waste time. On the chance of her makin' a runaway marriage with an unfit party, I'd turn this whole city inside out, and do it now."

"She's gone straight to him, of course," she said, with a groan. "I might have guessed it. I never should have let her out of my sight. It was a moral certainty she would run to that man with her disappointment."

"Or the pearls," said Bill.

"You're quite right. How do we know that Holy hasn't given them to her? Or she may have got two thirds of them from 'Piggy' Rhinehart, by letting him keep the rest. All her performance at Mr. Saintsbury's may have been a piece of acting. She's quite clever enough."

"As to the man——"

"I know nothing, absolutely nothing, not even that

he lives in New York. It's absurd to hunt for *him,* and I'm afraid of the scandal if we try to find Anna. How would you go about it?"

He began to describe the methods, and they terrified her. She cut him short; she would look through Anna's things again more thoroughly.

They returned to Mrs. Clarendon's apartments just in time to receive a telephone call from Mr. Saintsbury. She could not tell him how she had lost Holy, and still less that Anna was abroad at such an hour with no known escort.

"Anna's gone to the Hippodrome with Mr. and Mrs. Page"—two acquaintances from Boston—"I've sent Holy down there. He hasn't called me up yet. It's a very large theater, you know. He may have to wait till the show is over, and that'll be quite late."

"You should have gone down there yourself," said Saintsbury. "Bring the idiots to me as soon as you get hold of them."

Mrs. Clarendon remained at the telephone, and called Burgoyne's number. His rooms were in a small building whose lower regions were occupied by a branch bank. There was no common switchboard for the three bachelor tenants above, and Mrs. Clarendon's call elicited no response whatever.

"He may have gone to see Jack Pinney," she suggested. "What's that number?"

Bill gave it doubtfully, aware of the tension that existed in the Forty-fifth Street apartments, and fearing indiscretions on both ends of the line. But in fact the conversation was only an exchange of

courtesies with Jack Pinney, who surpassed himself in suavity but had no information as to Burgoyne. The perfect art with which Pinney concealed his horrible anxiety almost beguiled the lady from her own, and she rewarded the accomplished rascal with some crumbs of encouragement.

As she turned from the telephone the bell recalled her, and she learned that a note was being sent up. It proved to be a message from Burgoyne.

The uncertain and laborious superscription prepared her in some measure for the contents, which was distinguished by the careful reticence of a man who has just sense enough to be aware that he does not know what he is saying. Burgoyne deeply regretted that he had been compelled to default in his engagement, and perhaps to cause anxiety and annoyance. He was still detained by the matters to which he alluded, and unfortunately they were of such a nature that an explanation would better be postponed. Part of his letter read:

> You will probably have seen Anna when you receive this. Do all that you can for her in the next day or two; all that you can; I ask it most earnestly. Guard her from any unwise or hasty decision with all your power. I hope to see you both——

But his statement as to when this was likely to happen baffled all comprehension. The lucidity of the preceding lines seemed to have exhausted the

author, and he concluded with some further phrases of regret, which were a curious jumble.

There was nothing to indicate where Burgoyne had written the note. Indeed, the paper—a folded sheet of fine quality—had been clipped at the top as if to remove an engraved heading. The plain envelope was of cheap grade.

Investigation disclosed that the note had been given to one of the bell boys by a gentleman. The boy, being sent to Mrs. Clarendon's rooms, said that the gentleman had met him near the Fifty-eighth Street entrance. Whether he had gone on into the hotel, or out again, the boy did not know. The gentleman was tall and straight, and dressed in dark clothes; he wore no hat, but may have had one in his hand; he carried a paper bag, quite large.

It was impossible not to suspect the reappearance of mint julep in this affair; but if Burgoyne had merely wandered away on the trail of the serpent that lurks in the cup, how had he learned that Anna was not at home? Obviously he had known it, and had chosen to leave the explanation to be made by the girl herself.

The bell boy had told all that he knew, and more, and had pocketed his tip. He opened the door, but, instead of going out, he stepped aside with uncommon celerity, making room for Anna Holden to enter.

There was warrant for this discretion. Anna looked as if she might have walked through the bell boy and straight on across the room and out of the

window, wholly regardless of consequences. There was an awful placidity in her aspect, a more than mortal indifference; she dominated the scene like a ghost. The boy escaped from the room on tiptoe, and Mrs. Clarendon recoiled a pace or two, though her only conscious impression, an absurdity under the circumstances, was amazement at the girl's beauty. The tragic mask, worn with such utter simplicity, was a revelation even to Bill Harris.

"Anna!" Mrs. Clarendon exclaimed. "What have you done?"

"I?" said the girl. "Why, nothing; nothing at all. I've been riding, to get the air. Good evening, Mr. Harris. Have you seen Cousin Holy?"

"We haven't," said Mrs. Clarendon. "Do you know where he is?"

"I haven't the least idea. I left him at Mr. Saintsbury's."

"When?"

"Oh, long ago. What time is it?" And she thanked Bill for telling her, though it seemed doubtful whether she heard what he said.

"Mr. Saintsbury wants to see you," Mrs. Clarendon ventured.

"Now?" said Anna. "Very well. I'd as soon go there as anywhere. Don't shake your head, Mr. Harris; I'm perfectly fit to go. He'll question me, but he won't find out anything. Cousin Julia couldn't, and I never loved her more."

"Then you'd better be with her," said Bill; "with her alone. Don't talk to anybody else. Not to-

night." He turned to Mrs. Clarendon. "I'm going to Forty-fifth Street. You can call me in a few minutes, or any time. It's likely I'll be there late." Anna had walked toward her own room. "And you'll be here?" he added. "In my judgment she'd better be put to bed. If possible."

CHAPTER IX

COUNT DI SENTI

ANNA HOLDEN'S adventures in the last few hours began with her ride down the Avenue in a cab. She alighted at the Waldorf, whence she telephoned to a small bachelor apartment house on Thirty-first Street.

"Count di Senti, please," she said.

"Who wants him?" said the hallman, and Anna gave the name: "Miss Radcliffe."

A brief delay, and then the count's voice, very soft and pleasant, with a touch of pathos apparently habitual and the result of many sorrows.

"Hello! Oh, my dear, is it you? Did all go well?"

"No, it did *not*. I didn't get them, and I'm simply out of my mind."

Vague sounds of distress came over the wire, as Anna took breath and proceeded:

"I want to see you right away. I'm at the Waldorf. You must come over here immediately."

"You didn't get them! But in the name of Heaven why not? What has Mr. B. done with them? Where is he?"

"I can't talk of it by telephone. Don't you understand? I must see you now, *now!* I want you to help me."

"Can't you come to me here? There are reasons——"

"No, no! I'm alone, of course. I had to get away from Cousin Julia."

"But, my dear, there are men outside; two at least. They've been told I'm not in. They are waiting for me to come."

"They're always waiting. Tell them you can't pay them to-day. This is no time to fuss with creditors."

"These men are different," he protested. "I never saw them before. I think they have court papers. They may even arrest me, and that would upset all our plans."

"If anything upsets them now, they'll be right side up," she said. "They've been very thoroughly turned over, I assure you. Don't be a baby, Angelo; you can't be arrested for a tailor's bill."

"But wouldn't it be *better* for you to come here? Surely, under the circumstances——"

"No, I won't do it. You ought to know that by this time. I'll do what I did last Saturday. My cab will be outside your door in five minutes, and I'll tell the driver to start the instant you come out of the house. Run and jump in, as you did before. Then we'll ride about and decide what to do. I'm not beaten yet, Angelo."

The mere sight of Di Senti after he had skipped across the sidewalk into her cab, instantly dethroned Anna's intelligence, as usual. She had discovered and had confessed to herself some days ago that she was mindless in his presence. Thus for the moment she forgot what it was all about, and knew only that

he had taken her hands and was kissing them. She only saw his beautiful face, his big, sorrowful, fascinating eyes.

"Oh, my dear, the pearls!" he said. "What has become of them?"

"Holy's got them," she said. "He must have found out what I meant to do. Has he ever asked you any questions?"

"About you? No, certainly not. How should he know anything?"

"We've ridden together——"

"But in cabs, my dearest. No one has seen us."

"We've had tea, and we've danced. Some one must have carried the news to Holy; and he was jealous."

"No; he doesn't think of me that way; he isn't selfish enough. I'll give Holy his due, even now when I could strangle him! If he's done this thing, it was for my sake entirely."

"What *has* he done?" There was feeble but complete despair in Di Senti's voice.

"He's pretended that the pearls were stolen; and he tells the most ridiculous story. I don't know how he expects Mr. Saintsbury to believe it, or to imagine that anybody except himself has got the pearls. I'll tell you just exactly what he says, and see if you can guess what he means to do."

Accordingly she related Burgoyne's story with clearness and precision, giving an account of the affair at Mr. Saintsbury's, and including Mrs. Clarendon's assault upon the good name of Jack Pinney.

"But isn't Mrs. Clarendon probably right?" said Di Senti. "From all I've heard of Mr. Pinney——"

"Nonsense!" Anna cut him short. "Cousin Julia doesn't believe it herself. She's helping Cousin Holy, though I'm quite sure he hasn't asked her, or confided in her at all. Unless she's even deeper than I think she is, she doesn't know a single thing about you and me."

Count di Senti said that he could not in the least understand Mr. Burgoyne's behavior. Why did he take the blame upon himself when it wasn't necessary? Possibly he had not told the whole story before the ladies; he might have given a very different account to Mr. Saintsbury.

"Don't you dream of such a thing," said Anna. "I know him too well. He's told the story that he'll stick to; he'll never try to get out of it at anybody else's expense. Mr. Saintsbury can't help seeing through it, but of course he'll accuse Jack Pinney in order to make the association find the pearls. We must get them first."

Di Senti asked what could be done. Had she any plan?

The first thing to do was to find out what Holy had done with the pearls. He wouldn't have hidden them in his rooms, of course—the first place where any one would look—and it had been too late for him to put them in a safe-deposit box, even if he dared. In fact it seemed almost sure that he hadn't had time to dispose of them in any final manner.

"Whatever he did was done before Mr. Pinney got in, of course," said she, "and that was at Twenty-

sixth Street; so I should think the pearls must be somewhere between that place and your store, in a general way. What do you think?"

The count did not know of any place in the region indicated where even so reckless a person as Burgoyne would have dared to leave anything so valuable. In his opinion, Burgoyne had either given them to some person whom he supposed that he could trust, or—what was more probable—he had put them into a money belt.

"But aren't they too large?"

"No," said the count. "It could be done. It is what I fear the most. If he carries them so, it will be impossible for any one to get them."

"But couldn't men like Jack Pinney tell that he was wearing a belt? Still I bumped him in the back pretty hard, when I took that box away from him, but I didn't feel anything."

This evidence was hardly conclusive, but Di Senti showed his usual readiness to discard an opinion. It was rarely possible to dispute with him except over some trivial matter, in regard to which he would often be as obstinate as a woman. In the controversies which had spiced their brief romance, the girl had generally been obliged to take both sides in order to preserve the emotional tension which her nature demanded; and now, when Di Senti abandoned the idea of the money belt, Anna took it up.

"He'll carry the pearls with him, of course," she said. "That's the only safe way, but probably he didn't dare to have them with him at Mr. Saintsbury's. Holy left the pearls somewhere, and he'll

go and get them just as soon as he has a chance. We must follow him."

"What then?" said Di Senti. "Are we to take them away from him?"

"Let me have Cousin Holy and those pearls together in one room," she said. "I'll bet he won't keep them. He can't do it honestly, and I'll make him understand it."

"You wouldn't wish me to be present, of course," said Di Senti. "That would merely make him angry; and there really wouldn't be anything I could do."

"Oh, yes," she said; "I want you to hold him while I go through his pockets."

The astonished countenance of Di Senti showed that he took this seriously. She laughed at him with contempt, which instantly dissolved in tenderness; and she took one of his slender hands in a quick, hard clasp.

"I'll do the fighting," she said. "I guess I'll have to, all our lives together."

On the subject of their lives together, Di Senti had often been eloquent in two languages at once, but on this occasion he was dumb in both, save for a few despondent and barely articulate phrases.

"It distresses me to mention it," said he finally, "but we mustn't go too far."

"What!" she cried. "Let me tell you I'll go any length that's necessary to get my pearls!"

"No, dearest," he said; "I mean with the cab. Unfortunately I have only a dollar."

"Fiddlesticks!" said she. "I have plenty of money. I've told the man where to go."

With that the cab swung out of Madison Avenue, ran half the block, and stopped across the way from Mr. Saintsbury's house. They had arrived just as the lawyer completed the inquisition wherein Nielson had "got along good." He came out with Burgoyne who patted him on the shoulder for his good behavior. Then Nielson rode away—to that interview with Gleason and Pinney, already described—and Burgoyne went into the house.

"He'll come out again," Anna said, "and then we'll follow him, and I'll bet he leads us to the pearls."

Di Senti argued that if she really meant to follow her cousin, she would better do it alone. Why run the risk of so complete an exposure as would result from Mr. Burgoyne's seeing them riding about the city at night?

"We won't let him see you," Anna rejoined. "Leave it to me; I'll manage it."

"But he has sent away his car. He may stay for hours. And I have had no dinner."

"Oh, you are so weak!" she cried. "No wonder Piggy Rhinehart got you in his clutches. I'll bet you've paid your debt to him half a dozen times over, and yet you go on working in his shop like a slave for virtually nothing. With your acquaintance, your title, your appearance, you could get another position in a minute. I haven't asked you to be rich, Angelo; I can get along without it. But sometimes I'm angry with you, as I am now, because you won't do *anything*. Everybody thinks you're a partner at Seitz's, with a good salary besides."

"At the time of my unfortunate speculations," Di Senti replied, in a weary tone, "Mr. Rhinehart advanced to me a large sum of money which saved me from dishonor. I made an agreement with him, being obliged to accept such terms as he would offer. It has been impossible for me to live as a gentleman must, in New York, even though his means are known to be small, and consequently I have incurred debts which are very troublesome, but I have kept my engagement with Mr. Rhinehart."

"You should never have gone into it," she retorted. "If I made such an agreement, I'd break it or the head of the man who wouldn't let me. But we won't quarrel about it, Angelo. You've been cheated and abused, and I ask nothing better than to help you out of all your troubles. Do you think I'm not going to have my pearls again? I tell you I'll have them before this week is over. Then they'll disappear the way I want them to, the way we've planned; and all your worries will vanish at the same time."

"I will tell you what is the truth," said Di Senti; "if we were sure to have the pearls this week, it would not be in time. My situation is so bad that I cannot hold out even for a few days longer."

"You mean your debts?" said she. "Oh, nonsense! "What can these people do to you?"

He replied that because his agreements with Rhinehart were secret he had been obliged to pose as a partner and a person of consequence at Seitz's. His creditors threatened to accuse him of false pretenses, and they could probably make out a case, wholly un-

just, but plausible enough to result in his arrest. In that event, Rhinehart would turn against him and be numbered with his enemies.

"Well, I shouldn't, you know," said she. "On the contrary, I'd get you out of it. Let me teach you the little rhyme about poor dog Tray, ever faithful, and we'll translate it into Italian."

Di Senti declined to be cheered. He accused himself of having been in the wrong from the beginning, from the first time he ever saw her, the first word he ever spoke to her. He was a poor man, harassed and hunted; he had no right to intrude into her life or to claim any share of her thoughts. He was not to blame for having loved her; the heart no one can control; but he should have kept silence. The hour had come when she must think of him no more. He would better say good-by and leave her; he was a ruined man. Anna heard only a beloved voice full of despair. She did not dream of connecting Di Senti's attack of conscience with the loss of the pearls, except as that event had touched the easy spring of his despondency.

Di Senti did not insist upon being understood. When he saw that his sentimental reason for saying an immediate farewell would not accomplish anything, he emphasized the folly of his accompanying her in the pursuit of Burgoyne.

While this point was in debate, Rhinehart arrived at Mr. Saintsbury's, followed in a few minutes by Mrs. Clarendon and Bill Harris. It was the last-named individual whom Anna feared more than all the others. He had appealed very powerfully to her

imagination; she suspected him of possessing singular faculties not properly human.

As he crossed the sidewalk in his customary attitude of meditation, it was as if he were following a trail, and she seemed to see him move heavily and silently through doors and walls till he came to where the pearls were hidden, and laid his awful hand upon them. Her head was fairly out of the cab, and Di Senti drew her back.

"There's a light on that side," he warned her. "Some one will look across and see your face."

He renewed his arguments that she would better be alone, without producing the slightest effect upon Anna's opinion. She wished him to be just where he was; the irritation of disputing with him was agreeable.

The minutes passed, and Di Senti did not escape, though he began to disclose unexpected possibilities of sullenness and temper, so that there dawned faintly in a small corner of the girl's mind a sense of genuine contention with a real person not completely agreeable. At this point, however, there was a decisive interruption; Saintsbury's door opened, and Burgoyne marched out, hatless, into the night.

CHAPTER X

DISILLUSIONED

FROM the first moment of his advent, he looked straight at the cab, and he kept his gaze fixed upon it as if forbidding it to move. Anna dodged back, for it seemed to her that Holy was staring right into her eyes. Di Senti swore in English, contrary to his habit.

"I told you!" he whispered angrily. "We are caught!"

"Tell the man to start," said Anna; and the count was already trying to do so.

The girl cast one glance at Holy, and he was halfway across the street. The natural inference was that he thought the cab empty, and intended to engage it; but Anna was stricken with the idea that he had seen and recognized her. At any rate, he would do it in another instant, and would discover Di Senti as well. The latter calamity must be avoided at all costs, and Anna opened the door and jumped out just as the cab started with unusual violence. By great good luck she escaped a fall, and she stood confronting her cousin with defiance.

Holy covered his surprise in excellent style.

"Hello, Anna!" said he. "Are you all right? That was a nice jump."

Before she could reply, the thought flashed through

her mind that Di Senti had only a dollar, and the taxicab had been devouring money for Heaven knew how long.

"Wait, Holy!" she cried. "I've left something in the cab." She fled with amazing speed toward the Avenue.

The cab had slackened its pace, perhaps while Di Senti was giving orders, and Anna hoped to overtake it at the crossing; but it spurted again and turned southward. Evidently the count feared Holy more than the cabman, and was determined to escape; but what would happen afterward? Anna had perfect faith in the count's incompetency; there might be forty ways out of this trouble, but he would never find one of them. She had visions of insult and abuse awaiting him, with a police station at the end of it. The whole story would be told in the papers, with the direst consequences.

When she turned the corner into the Avenue, Di Senti's jehu was beyond call; but on the far side another cab, empty, was coming down at a moderate pace. She ran across and boarded the vehicle before the driver could bring it to a halt; in fact, it didn't stop at all, but went on in pursuit of the one which bore Count di Senti.

Burgoyne had followed Anna, knowing that she would fail to overhaul cab No. 1, and neglecting to consider the possibility of a cab No. 2. He had seen Di Senti and he walked the more slowly from the need of self-control. "This is no time to give Di Senti what he deserves," he warned himself. "My

little cousin! What can I say that is kind? What can I do that will help?"

He reached the corner just as Anna's skirts vanished into the moving cab which passed out of his sight long before another offered itself for his own use.

The luck of the thoroughfare was all with Di Senti's driver; nothing got in his way, but Anna's man lost a few seconds at almost every crossing. Di Senti's cab turned westward in Forty-seventh Street, and there at last the pursuer had a clear run. At the end of the long block there was not more than fifty yards between, and Anna felt relieved of anxiety. She had no doubt now as to where the count was going, for she happened to know that there is a police station on West Forty-seventh Street. This did not matter; she would be on hand to pay the score.

Just beyond Sixth Avenue, however, Di Senti's cab veered to the south side of the street and stopped. Anna's chauffeur had received no definite orders to cover such a contingency; he simply followed the leader and drew up to the curb close behind it.

There are several apartment houses at this point, and Anna's inference was that Di Senti had come to ask some friend for a loan. Before she could alight or call to him, he had ascended the steps leading to one of these houses, from which there emerged at this moment a handsome and robust young woman in a bad temper.

Anna received a number of impressions all in a flash: That Di Senti knew this woman, for he

stopped instantly at the sight of her; that she might be a person of consequence in Italian circles; that it was odd if she lived in this house, but where was her car? She came to the edge of the steps, and in this better view she looked like a singer. With explosive vivacity she addressed Di Senti in his own language; and her first words would be too startling in an accurate translation. Let the speech be rendered thus:

"Mother of Moses! Have you come at last? Is it your opinion that I am fasting for the benefit of my figure?"

Her enunciation was peculiarly crisp, and Anna understood every word. Di Senti had come to take this woman to dinner. She had been waiting for him; that was why he had been so anxious to get away.

The revelation stupefied Anna like a blow on the head. It must be remembered that her mind had been thoroughly possessed by the idea of her pearls as the one thing essential to immediate bliss for herself and Di Senti. The two had only one desire in the world, and the Burgoyne pearls were the price of its realization. The pearls were not lost, but only snatched away for a moment; and she and Di Senti were panting in pursuit of them. Not at all; he was really worrying about a dinner engagement with another woman.

Di Senti seemed to be making explanations which the woman received with distrust; they had stepped back into the doorway, and were conferring very privately. Anna could see, however, that the woman

permitted herself to be placated. Presently she took money from a silk bag and gave it to Di Senti, who added it to some bills taken from his pocket, a slender roll, but not the single dollar he had mentioned as his all.

They came down, then, to the sidewalk, and apparently debated as to where they should go. They were very near to Anna. In the closer view and stronger light, she recognized the woman as one with whom Di Senti's name had been connected, though only in the vaguest rumor so far as Anna knew. Di Senti had denied ever having seen her except at Seitz's, where she had exchanged a present from an admirer for something she liked better.

She was Teresa Campanari. She had sung at the Metropolitan in the past season not without success, but had become involved in a quarrel with the management. After she had been a member of a concert company which had visited Boston, and it happened that Anna had seen and heard her—and had been very favorably impressed.

In New York, after Anna had lost her heart to Di Senti and had heard the rumor which has been mentioned, she asked Mrs. Clarendon about Teresa Campanari, whose portrait had been printed in a newspaper in connection with a scandal of no great magnitude and not entirely credible. Mrs. Clarendon had replied with very shocking information, sugared and diluted. On another occasion, Cousin Holy, who never spoke serious evil of any woman, had been unable to find any defense for this one, and had quietly driven her name out of the conversation.

Looking at her now, Anna retained, in spite of all, the first impression which had been made upon her when she listened with pleasure to this woman's voice, and seemed to see something above the usual in her bearing. Here was a really bad woman, but certainly not commonplace; she possessed distinction, she was beautiful, if one cared for that style. Anna admired women of positive qualities, original, striking, and intelligent.

But watching the two together, and the way in which the singer acted up to the pitiful weaknesses of the count as she had so recently done herself, made her see things in their real values. She had a sudden and tense desire for change, that was not so much the result of her scorn of the count as of the realization of her own stupidity.

Di Senti had dwindled to the value of a rat, yet she retained a certain curiosity as to his conduct. His real sentiment toward herself no longer mattered, but she knew that he had been a sincere suitor for the Burgoyne pearls. No falsity of his in love could persuade Anna that his heart had not been true to half a million dollars—the sum which they had planned to get. Up to that evening he had been as ardent in their conspiracy as she herself. Beyond doubt he had counted on their success, and she now believed that he had meant to fleece her of the money as soon after their marriage as possible, if not before.

It seemed incredible that even so poor-spirited a creature should have given up so easily, and should

not have been willing at least to make an effort to retrieve the pearls.

The portion of the girl's mind which was still capable of thinking busied itself with this matter. Di Senti and the woman had now boarded their cab, which had turned to the east; and Anna's driver, without further instructions, had continued the pursuit. It was an excellent, lonesome opportunity for meditation; Anna felt detached from the world, and even from her own body like an entranced philosopher on a mountaintop. There was a relief in reasoning upon the events of the evening calmly. It was all over; she might as well know what had really happened.

Of course Di Senti had merely been trying to get away from her; she perfectly understood that. But, recalling what he had said to her, she found that it rang false and feeble in more ways than one. The loss of herself he might have borne with equanimity, but how about the pearls? There, indeed, was a great and sudden disappointment, and the more she thought of it, the more she missed the lamentations and tearing of the hair. It was not like Di Senti to lose all that money without making more fuss about it. Did he truly believe that he had lost it? Had he given up the game, or only deserted his partner?

If he knew something about the pearls which he had kept to himself, his behavior was comprehensible. Why had he assured her over and over again that it would be impossible to get the pearls away from Cousin Holy? The answer could only be: So that she wouldn't get them first. He was trying to

discourage and delay her because he had his own plan. She wondered whether he had spied on Cousin Holy when he opened the candy box at Seitz's. Possibly he had seen something then which gave him a clew; or he might have followed Cousin Holy's car, and so have gained a hint as to where the pearls were hidden.

Di Senti's cab went down Fifth Avenue, and Anna was aware of something almost like a natural interest. The chase seemed to be leading in the right direction, for she had already decided that the pearls were south of Twenty-sixth Street. She spoke to her chauffeur, telling him that when the other cab stopped he must go some distance beyond it so as not to attract attention.

At Thirty-first Street, they left the Avenue, and it seemed that Di Senti's apartments must be the destination, but they went a little way farther and halted in front of an Italian restaurant. Anna's chauffeur went on as she had directed, and he kept going until she halted him. When this had been accomplished, she looked back, and saw two men and two women, guests of the restaurant presumably, getting into the cab which Di Senti and Teresa Campanari had abandoned.

Then for interminable minutes Anna waited, kneeling on the seat and looking out rearward through the window. There was nothing now to occupy her thoughts but wretchedness and self-disgust. She made a vain struggle to begin the rebuilding of her life; she would go on with it and be a different girl; but the fierce directness and sincerity which was as

conspicuous in her character as in Cousin Holy's prevented her from pretending that she had any real interest in reformation.

What she began to want with an unchristian fervor was an opportunity to inflict pain on Di Senti. He was a rat, the animal she peculiarly despised, but it seemed right that he should suffer; and she regretted that he did not have a capacity for anguish equal to her own, and that a few borrowed dollars in his pocket, a quart of Chianti on the table, and a pretty woman to flatter his vanity would make him happy for the moment, even in the very act of bewailing his debts and misfortunes.

Her nature was not passive; the impulse to strike back was apt to follow promptly upon every hurt; and by indulging this tendency she was gradually raising Di Senti in her thoughts to the level from which contempt had put him down. As an object of acute resentment, he threatened to become again a human being, but the process was interrupted by the sight of a woman who came out of the restaurant alone.

At the distance and in the uncertain light, an ordinary woman would have been unrecognizable, but Teresa Campanari had a presence which carried a long way. Anna looked for Di Senti to follow, and the anticipation of seeing him was attended by a deadly faintness which infuriated her. But Di Senti did not appear.

Teresa took a cab which a waiter had called for her. She rode to the Avenue and turned northward. As to what this might mean, Anna could think of

no better explanation than that Teresa had quarreled with Di Senti and had left him, but the woman had not seemed to be in a rage; and it was strange that the count had not followed her out.

As the minutes throbbed away Anna persuaded herself that she must find out what had taken place. She directed her cabman to drive up to the restaurant, and sent him in with a message. He brought her the surprising information that Count di Senti had not visited the establishment in the course of that evening. Who said so? The manager. Did he seem to know Count di Senti? Oh, sure!

But Anna was not satisfied, and she herself went in. The manager politely repeated his statement as to Di Senti, but he was reticent as to Signora Campanari, doubtless scenting jealousy. He had seen no sign that she was waiting for any one to join her; she had dined alone, very hastily, and had just gone away. That was all he knew.

It was plain that Di Senti has left Teresa at the door of the restaurant, and had rushed off in a hurry, not even taking time to go in and see that she was seated. Presumably he had gone to his rooms, only a few steps distant. If he had been going further, he would have retained the cab—so Anna reasoned.

She rode past his house. No light was visible at his windows on the third floor; yet afterwards she was in doubt as to this. There might have been a gleam at the sides of the closely drawn curtains. Still, if he were in, why hadn't Signora Campanari joined him? Perhaps she supposed him to be hunt-

ing for the pearls, and did not think it possible he could have found them so soon. Doubtless the woman had an appointment with Di Senti elsewhere.

Anna had lost all her dreams, and she loathed the memory of them. She felt cheapened beyond endurance and to the verge of self-destruction. Her higher nature seemed already to have died, but something of the lower instincts still survived. At moments she felt a murderous resentment against Di Senti, knowing now that he had meant to rob her, in one way or another, and to spend the price of her pearls, and of her heart and soul besides, on a wicked and notorious woman.

CHAPTER XI

FOR BLACKMAIL

BILL HARRIS returned to the rooms on Forty-fifth Street, and found Gleason there, alone. The hair of the blond Adonis stood out at all angles; he was coatless and collarless, and his shirt was open at the throat. On the table beside which he had been sitting was a glass of whisky and soda.

"Been worryin', Frank?" he asked.

"That's hardly the word to describe any mental state of mine, I hope," said Gleason, seating himself with dignity. "I'm not Pinney's grandmother. I've been advising and encouraging him." He gracefully lifted the glass of whisky and soda, and not even Bill's eye could perceive that he did it because his lips were so dry that he dared not go on talking. "What have they got against him, Bill? Anything that looks like evidence?"

"Saintsbury claims an eyewitness," Bill replied, "against you and Jack. Where——"

"Against me?" Injured innocence scorned the imputation. "What rot! This whole game is a frame-up, Bill. They're all on the crook."

"Burgoyne seems straight," said Bill. "He's the party under suspicion."

"Whose suspicion? Give me the case, Bill. What have you dug up?"

Bill told the tale, surpassing himself in brevity.

"I'll go into this deeper," he said, "when Jack comes. Where is he?"

Gleason ignored the question.

"An eyewitness, did you say? Who's the man, and what will he swear to?"

"That depends on whether he really knows anything," said Bill. "Saintsbury thinks he does. If not, a story will be framed. It's likely to be seein' Pinney pass the pearls out o' the car. That's the point to be covered. The man's Nielson, the chauffeur. Wasn't he here?"

Gleason was busy with the whisky and soda which he had lifted from the table the moment that the Swede's name was mentioned. Thus he gained ten seconds for thought, in which time he made the dangerous decision to change the story agreed upon with Pinney. They had decided to admit Nielson's visit, fearing that Bill might have seen him. The Swede had said that he came to the outer door twenty times before his nerve would carry him in. Probably he was engaged in this struggle when Bill went out to meet Mrs. Clarendon.

The story was to have been that the chauffeur had come with a message from Burgoyne, a verbal assurance of his support for Pinney; but Gleason was now inspired to attempt something better. He thought he saw a way to get the two thousand dollars, the price of the Swede's silence. That problem had been too much for Pinney, thus far; Gleason would solve it.

"Yes," said he. "Nielson was here. He's out

for the stuff, Bill. We shall have trouble with that man."

"What does he know?"

"The one thing needful: that Saintsbury wants him for a witness. Jack and I didn't quite agree as to what he really meant to say, but it's my opinion that he came to get our bid. He'll testify to anything that Saintsbury pays him for, unless our money stacks taller."

"He thinks quick," said Bill, "for a squarehead."

"The promptings of the heart," Gleason replied. "Our friend needs the money. He wants to get married."

"A man ought to start housekeepin' on clean money," Bill remarked. "I've seen many a man marry, after the excitement of a haul, on a roll that hadn't quit smellin' o' nitroglycerin. An' I've seen many a poor woman tryin' to live straight, an' her husband in the pen. By the time he gets out, she's in line to go in, if weak to begin with. So there's two crooks instead o' one; an' maybe a third not old enough to understand where his father's gone. We stake Nielson to no wedding. We bribe nobody."

"I agree with you absolutely, in principle," Gleason assured him, "but if this man is going to be bought up, anyhow, we ought to get him, and save Jack. That's what the voice of conscience says to *me*."

"You want to put a new record on that machine," Bill admonished him. "We'll save Jack another way. Where is he?"

"He's gone over to the square to meet Saintsbury's shadows," Gleason answered. "Two of them

were waiting outside when we went to dinner—imported talent; I never saw either of them before. Jack and I got on to them before we reached the corner, so we split there, and the gumshoes followed Jack. He threw them three times, and picked them up every time—while I was keeping his soup hot in the Pansy Room. They said they'd had enough, so Jack staked them to the movies, and they went. He's meeting them now with a report to cover the whole night, and he'll arrange to do the same for the day shift to-morrow afternoon."

Bill condemned this procedure as beneath the dignity of the association and savoring of a crooked deal. The men were hired to follow Pinney; let them do their work honestly, and take their chance. Gleason argued that the men had taken the only chance that existed. Twice a day, by this plan, they would really know where Pinney was. It was the only way to give Saintsbury anything at all for his money.

In the midst of these remarks Gleason caught sight of Pinney, who had entered the apartment by the rear door, and was standing just beyond the portières with an open letter in his hand. He put it into his pocket, and Gleason knew that it was not to be mentioned.

"Ah, Bill, old boy!" said Pinney, coming in. "Still valiant for truth, by what I overheard. But I can't lead two blind men around town on a rope, you know. That's a job for a dog."

Terror invaded Gleason's bosom at his partner's sudden advent, for he remembered that he had

crossed Pinney in the dangerous matter of the Swede. He dared not attempt a signal, for though Bill was weak on spoken languages, he knew more signs than anybody else in the world, and his peculiar downward gaze, as his associates were well aware, really took in everything between the floor and the ceiling. To introduce the subject prematurely was too hazardous, and Gleason had to wait till it came up in its natural place.

Bill waived the moral issue of the detectives and proceeded to tell the story of his evening's work, setting forth the case as it had developed under his investigations. All evidence that Burgoyne had the pearls was welcome to Pinney, and for the accusation against himself he was prepared; but the statement that Saintsbury suspected the chauffeur of knowing more than he had told was a knife-thrust under Pinney's fifth rib.

"Frank tells me Nielson was here," Bill said. "What do you make of it?"

Pinney felt some mysterious influence shuddering in the air, and his instinctive caution was aroused.

"I think Saintsbury can buy him," said he, and, not daring to question Frank with an eye, he listened to the big fellow's anxious breathing, and heard the slight break that meant relief.

That was enough for Pinney, and he drew from the others what it was necessary to know without putting his foot near the trap. He saw presently what Gleason had tried to do, and he joined with him in the argument that the Swede should at least

be made to understand that there was money on both sides of the case.

"We have a right to pay this man for information," he urged. "Who's going to know how much we give him? Bill, do you realize what it will mean if he testifies against me, and we don't find the pearls? We can't hold Saintsbury; we've really got nothing on him. The story he told to you is legally good. He can come out into the open and have me arrested; Frank, too, perhaps, and even yourself. If Saintsbury gets those goods, without our knowledge, he'll put them where it'll be impossible to find them.

The rancid old vulture has no conscience. He'll send me to the pen if he can. At the best of it, I'll be under a criminal charge that I can never disprove; I'll be on bail, under everybody's suspicion. My life will be ruined. Do you think that Woodbury Newcomb, who set me on my feet, would see me trampled down again like this, for the sake of a few dollars or a petty scruple? Never in this world!"

The speech was very feelingly delivered; it affected Gleason deeply. Bill saw him wringing his hands under the table. The reference to Newcomb had touched Bill in what may be called comparatively his soft spot.

"You know what these people are," Pinney continued. "Burgoyne, Saintsbury, Mrs. Clarendon—the whole lot. They're members of a class; when the pinch comes they'll stand together. Remember that Saintsbury has every one of them in a hitch. He probably knows enough about Holy's debts to

have him locked up. Do you notice that he doesn't care what Holy says now about this case? He's no more afraid of him than of Rhinehart. In the end they'll all do what Saintsbury directs; they'll have to.

"But he can't get the final grip on *me* without this perjured testimony. I speak of myself, but what we're all thinking of is the association. Mr. Newcomb isn't here to defend it; he has put its safety and its honor into our hands. He will come back and ask for our accounting. I tell you, Bill, this scruple of yours may be the hole in the ground where he that had received one talent buried it in his master's absence. The right course is perfectly plain: if this Swede is for sale, we must buy him."

Bill made a dollar sign with his toe on the rug.

"What do you figure it'll cost?" he said.

Pinney seemed to give the matter prayerful consideration, and then named the sum of two thousand dollars. He advised that Bill should give it to him to-morrow.

"This deal's in my line," he said. "Leave it to me."

"I'll sleep on it," Bill responded. "But before anything's done, I want to see the man. Maybe he ain't really crooked, but only led away by loose talk. I'll look him up to-morrow."

Nothing worse could be imagined. What chance would there be for a blushing amateur like Nielson between a shrewd old corporation lawyer and Bill Harris, between the devil and the deep sea? One or the other would certainly break him down. Glea-

son's attempt at cleverness had more than doubled the dangers of the situation. Pinney seemed to hear the walls of the house creaking, ready to fall on his head and bury him in ruin. He hoped that something of the sort might be audible to Gleason, and he risked bestowing on the bungler a contemptuous smile.

Bill had gone on to describe the scene at the Plaza; he concluded with some expressions of anxiety as to Anna Holden. These he addressed more directly to Gleason, as one who might be called an expert in romance. What had probably occurred to put a girl of so strong a nature into such a state of mind?

"The stronger one is, the worse it hurts," Gleason asserted. "She's heartbroken, and she's dazed with the sudden shock. It hits hard. She tried to cast her pearls before a swine, and though the swine didn't get the pearls, the Scripture was verified, just the same. 'Lest they turn again and rend you'—in case it should have slipped your mind, Bill." Bill looked insulted. "She didn't shoot the pork, if that's what you're afraid of," Gleason continued. "She's too fine a creature. She wouldn't think such an animal worth shooting, after the black magic was out of her eyes and she'd seen him with the bristles on, all plain. But he's dead enough, so far as she's concerned. It's all over."

"If Holy took the pearls," Bill said, considerably relieved, "I think he done a good thing."

"Who saw him at the Plaza?" Pinney asked. "Was he badly stewed?"

"The note was," said Bill: "But it might not have been Burgoyne that brought it. Descriptions vary, an' they don't fit him very well."

"The man had no hat," said Pinney. "That shows who he was."

Gleason objected that Burgoyne usually wore a hat about town in the evening, but Pinney cut him short.

"It was Holy, and we've got to find him," he said, rising. "As the case stands, he's our only witness, and we can't let anything happen to him. I think Frank and I better go out and look him up."

Bill got to his feet.

"No, Ironface, you're going to stay right here," said Pinney. "We can't leave this place uncovered. Holy might take a notion to call."

"That's right." Bill sat down again. "I'll wait. Keep in touch with me, boys."

Gleason was already preparing to go out, moved to haste by his desire for a private word with Pinney, rather than enthusiasm for the hunt. What he wanted was encouragement in regard to Nielson. Was there a chance that the man could be silenced now that Saintsbury suspected him? Could he be kept away from Bill? It was plain to Gleason now that he should have reassured Bill as to the Swede, and not have magnified the importance of the matter. He expected bitter reproaches, and he wasted much mental labor in those excited moments trying to prepare a dignified defense.

CHAPTER XII

THE PAPER BAG

WHEN the door closed behind them, Pinney took him by the arm and spoke in his ear as they went down the stairs.

"You made a bad break, my boy," he said kindly, "but you meant well; you had an idea, such as it was, and I nearly put it over for you. I had Bill going, as you noticed, with the Newcomb stuff, and I'll have another try at him to-morrow—if there is any to-morrow of that kind, for you and me."

"What do you mean, Jack?"

"I mean that we may settle it to-night. We must if it's possible. The association is on the rocks, but if you and I can get ashore with the Burgoyne pearls, it'll have been a good voyage for us."

"How about Bill?" Gleason halted under the hall lamp. "Do we leave him to sink with the ship?"

"Bill's got the bank roll to draw to. He'll get away with twenty or thirty thousand. That'll stake him a long while; he's a moderate liver. Of course, we'll never let him go broke either."

"You talk as if you had the pearls in your hat," said Gleason. "Have you got a tip? What was that note I saw you put in your pocket?"

"Here it is," said Pinney, "but I can't wait while

you read it. There'll be light enough somewhere on the street."

Gleason took a hasty glance at the superscription. "From Burgoyne!" he said excitedly. "What's in it, Jack?"

"All the usual ingredients, I should say," Pinney replied. "I ought to know the stuff; I had six doses this afternoon."

Gleason tried to read the note as they walked along. Presently he swore softly, and stopped under a street lamp, the difference in bulk preventing Pinney from moving him. The note ran thus:

> DEAR PINNEY: I cannot tell you how deeply I deplore that my peculiar condition at this moment prevents me from telling you how deeply I deplore the occurrences to which I have referred as definitely as my peculiar condition at this moment will permit. I assure you of my full support. I should have seen you personally before this except for later and unforeseen occurrences which I shall ask you to regard as confidential in so far as here stated. I am entirely able to protect you, and I beg you to dismiss all anxiety because I can entirely protect you as soon as I can.
>
> I will make this even more definite when I see you personally, as already mentioned, probably not so soon as I had hoped, but in good time, either as stated or elsewhere. I regret that I am bound by obligations of honor which I may have overstepped in the hurry of this writ-

ing, but I repose full confidence in you to respect my obligations, and to censor all information herein contained that might benefit the enemy. Yours most sincerely,

HOLDEN TERRY BURGOYNE.

Gleason glanced up with a queer, cross-eyed look, and started to read the note again.

"Don't do it, Frank," said Pinney, "it'll go to your head. Aside from the fact that the man is drunk, there's only one point in the letter: he isn't coming to see me to-night. He means it; he'll stick to it; he has reasons that he won't forget. That's why I didn't show the note to Bill: he might not have been willing to wait in the rooms, and I don't want him on the hunt."

"How did this note come?"

"A messenger brought it. I met him at the door. Holy gave him the note at the Plaza more than half an hour ago, when he sent up the other to Mrs. Clarendon. There's a mistake in the address, and it delayed the boy. Frank, I could have jumped through the ceiling, upstairs there, wasting all that time, but I had to hear Bill's story, and I couldn't let him see that I was sweating blood."

"What's the objection to his going out with us?"

"Blessed St. Peter!" Pinney exclaimed. "Did you hear what he said about the paper bag?" Bill had in fact mentioned this point in describing the man at the Plaza. "The messenger gave me the same tip—a paper bag as big as that." He measured it in the air as the boy had done.

"Well?" said Gleason, confused.

"I ask you what was in it?" Pinney stabbed him with the question as if it had been a knife. "Think what Burgoyne would naturally do, as soon as he was loose from Saintsbury. He'd get the pearls, of course. He must have left them somewhere between Rhinehart's place and Twenty-sixth Street. I'm satisfied that they weren't in the car when I got aboard. Wherever he'd put them, he went straight to that place from Saintsbury's house." He tapped the note in Gleason's hand. "Frank, the author of those lucid lines is carrying the Burgoyne pearls through the white-light district in a paper bag."

Gleason glanced at the note, and then at Pinney. The awfulness of the idea seemed to sink slowly into him.

"No, no, Jack," he said; "that isn't possible!"

"Possible?" Pinney echoed. "It's inevitable. It's Holy Burgoyne."

"Besides," said Gleason, "what else could be in it? He wouldn't buy anything at that time of day."

Further discussion was perfectly futile. There was only one rational thing to be done—Burgoyne must be found. Fortunately he was a man of rigorously settled habits on occasions such as the present. He kept always on the move, virtually never sat down to drink, nor took more than one glass in a single resort. Pinney having made the rounds with him before, remembered many of his regular ports of call.

The list was made out and divided; and the two men set forth, each in a cab, after agreeing upon a

method of communication. At the end of the first half hour Pinney had visited some of the best stations on his schedule, and was already beginning to be surprised because he hadn't struck the trail. When Gleason reported by telephone that his labors also had been vain, Pinney was seriously perplexed. He began to fear that Burgoyne had gone to sleep in a taxicab.

He called up Bill, who had just been talking with Mrs. Clarendon. She had received no further word from Burgoyne, but her report cleared one point: the missing man was not at Saintsbury's. The lawyer had been forced to accept a plea that Anna was ill, but he had raged about Burgoyne. Mrs. Clarendon had not told him of the note, but he had scented mint julep in the air. The lady had attempted to remove the suspicion, but had failed. It was her opinion that the next meeting between Mr. Saintsbury and Mr. Burgoyne would be tragic. She dreaded it cruelly but hoped to be present.

She said that Anna had not told her anything of importance, except that she had met Holy for a moment near Mr. Saintsbury's house, and had received the venerable gentleman's message. This was to square her cousin, of course. Anna's mood was much softened; she was very sweet and affectionate, and had consented to go to bed. She had been crying, and Mrs. Clarendon was encouraged; she hoped that Anna would soon go to sleep.

This favorable news of Anna had been very welcome to Bill, and he insisted on giving Pinney all of it by telephone, repeating such of Mrs.

Clarendon's expressions as had stuck in his mind. Every second was a week to Pinney, all of whose thoughts were hounds on Burgoyne's track, but still he was aware of something gentlemanly in Bill's attitude toward the girl, something to which he could not own himself inferior. He responded, therefore, with expressions of the most delicate sympathy, but he cut Bill off as soon as it could decently be done, advising him to go home and get some sleep. Bill thanked him and said the advice seemed good. He would have to be up early; he must see Nielson the first thing in the morning.

With that final bit of information as an added burden on his mind, Pinney continued his quest, and it was wholly fruitless. He heard again from Gleason, who had nothing to tell. Shortly before two o'clock they met, but neither had anything to report except blank failure.

It was borne in upon their minds that the incredible had happened; that Holy had gone home. Several attempts had been made to call him up, but the lack of a response did not prove that he was not there. It was probable that he would not wake easily.

They walked down the Avenue to the building in which he lived. The entrance to the apartments above the bank was at the upper end of the Avenue frontage. The door was locked, and it resisted an experimental effort made by Gleason with tools that were part of a pocketknife, a souvenir of unregenerate days.

Pending a more serious trial, if that should seem

advisable, they went to inspect Burgoyne's windows which looked upon the cross street and upon a space between the building and its westward neighbor. There was no light at the windows, and all were closed—on a pleasant June night. If Holy was at home, he must be dead to all desire of ventilation; no bell would wake him; he might even have gone to sleep on the stairs.

Old Michael O'Halloran, the night watchman, came from the bank by a door on the little alley, and opened a gate in the iron fence. Gleason and Pinney were well-known to him; he greeted them with gusto. In his mind they were figures of romance and favorites of the gods. He was one of that multitude of humble persons who had attracted the kindly notice of Woodbury Newcomb, and who forever afterward regarded him with peculiar reverence. The reformation of Pinney and Gleason did not enter into his thoughts as questionable. He knew it for a fact; he had seen the man who did it.

Pinney in particular was a favorite. He had often spent an hour with the old watchman, telling him wild tales in which the moral was carefully pointed, and in which the reference to a complete change of heart was always introduced at the proper places. In return he had received with relish quaint legends of the fairies in Ireland.

"We're looking for our friend, Mr. Burgoyne," said Pinney. "Have you seen him to-night?"

O'Halloran was not sure. One of the young gentlemen had come home a short time ago, but O'Halloran had got only the merest glimpse of him,

crossing the sidewalk with the assistance of a cabman who was carrying his bag.

"Bag?" said Pinney.

"A small satchel, like. But I doubt it would be him that I saw. I'd sooner think it was ayther of the ither gintlemin."

"Didn't you see a light?" Pinney gestured toward the window.

"No," said O'Halloran. "Whichever he was, he hasn't yit found the push button."

Pinney explained that the gentleman's condition was the very point of the matter. Instead of keeping an extremely important engagement, Burgoyne had fallen by the wayside. A word from him was absolutely necessary, that night.

"We're going to get it out of him," Pinney added, "even if we have to wake him with a pulmotor. We rang his bell—just from politeness, you understand, Mr. O'Halloran; but it's possible he might be made to hear a knock, if we could get near enough. Have you a key to the door around the corner?"

O'Halloran had none, but if they wouldn't mind going up by way of the cellar, he could fix them as fine as a fiddle. Accordingly he led them in by the iron gate and by two doors and a stairway to a narrow strip of cellar separated from the bank vault by a wall whose interior strength or weakness was hidden by a facing of glazed brick. The gate and the doors he carefully locked behind him—against thieves.

These operations gave Pinney and Gleason oppor-

tunity for snatches of oral conference supplemented by signs. They thought it improbable that Burgoyne was in his rooms, but even if he were, there was to be no immediate attempt to get the pearls. Gleason was to go up alone and unlock the door of the apartment, and the street door, also. Returning as soon as possible, he was to say that Burgoyne did not answer, and must still be out. O'Halloran was to have a perfect chance to observe that nothing so bulky as the Burgoyne pearls was taken away.

Gleason contended that they were laying themselves too much open to O'Halloran, even with so cautious a procedure, and that the end of it all would be flight.

"Flight?" Every tense nerve in Pinney's body quivered at his partner's stupidity. "Nielson has settled that part of it. Remember, his two thousand dollars is only a first installment. There's forty thousand more. If we don't get the pearls, we can't pay that money; and if we do get them, we won't pay it. Sooner or later, Saintsbury will turn that Swede inside out, and then we're done. The association is doomed, Frank. This is the get-away."

In the cellar there was a second stairway leading to the hall on the Avenue front. Gleason ascended, while Pinney, by the exercise of his peculiar arts, detained the watchman where he would not notice that the operations above were conducted in silence. There would be no knocking, no disturbing of Burgoyne's repose, if he had found his way home. Gleason's task was merely to prepare for a subse-

quent and secret entry. Meanwhile, it was Pinney's part to keep O'Halloran amused and unsuspecting.

The witty old Irishman could do his bit in any jocular conversation, but no quips were needed to amuse Jack Pinney. The situation was enough. Here was he upon the brink of ruin, playing for one chance in a thousand to win the Burgoyne pearls; and there was Dan O'Halloran with his bunch of keys. If anything should happen to Dan within a minute or two, he wouldn't be missed till seven o'clock in the morning, four good hours, at least.

The keys, of course, would not open the way clear to any cash, nor could Pinney, unassisted, do the necessary drilling and blowing; but the luck would be cruel if he did not find a man within half an hour who would do it, and be very glad of the chance. In New York a pal for a game of that sort can be found as easily as a barber, except for the striped pole. Pinney knew one good man who lived in the next block.

There was a line of damaged chairs against the vault wall. Pinney sat in one of them, with Dan at his left hand. Lying on the seat of a fine old bit of directors' room furniture at Pinney's right was a heavy stick of mahogany broken from the arm. One blow, or how many? A man would have to keep on till he was sure. Brutal business. Pinney was already trying to forget the horror of the deed, as if he had done it.

He wouldn't harm a hair of O'Halloran's head. That was what had been the matter with Bill Harris

in the old days. He wouldn't even take a chance of hurting anybody; wouldn't carry a loaded gun, nor work with a partner who did. That was why he hadn't made more money than any other cracksman since safes were invented. Bill knew twice as much now as then. He had kept in touch with every improvement; he was always studying. He could move among burglar alarms as a cat in a china shop walks along the shelves covered with glassware.

Pinney wondered whether Bill could be persuaded to take a chance of this kind if the matter of the Burgoyne pearls should wreck the association. There might be a way to get past O'Halloran without hurting him, considering how completely they had his confidence. But the scandal would break suddenly, and then they wouldn't have anybody's confidence. They would be a bunch of crooks, shown up. All the papers would be full of it; the game would be done. The warning he had given to Gleason that afternoon came back to him, and he was astonished and rebuked by his own wisdom. Here was the very chance, right here; it had been inviting him for months, and he had never seen it.

"Dan, what kind of a gun are you carrying now?" he asked, putting out his hand. "Did you scrap that piece of old iron, as I told you to?"

"No, sir," said O'Halloran. "I keep putting it off. You see, in the daytime I don't need a gun. and at night the shops are closed. Besides, I'm busy."

He pulled the weapon from his pocket, and Pinney took it—an old-fashioned thirty-eight, five-shooter. It

would make an awful noise, but who would hear it? Pinney balanced it in his hand, playing with his emotions, irritating and disordering his natural sensibilities, unconsciously preparing himself to yield in other circumstances to a similar temptation.

He looked aside and saw Gleason, who came round a corner of the cellar wall, and stopped short, with his eye on the revolver. Pinney gave it back to its owner and wiped the sweat from the hand in which he had held it.

"No luck," said Gleason. "Couldn't raise him. He isn't there."

Pinney rose and went out with the others. He breathed the pure air deeply, drank it down. It seemed that he couldn't get enough. Parting with O'Halloran, he gave him ten dollars, and advised him to buy a new gun.

"Not there, eh?" said Pinney, when they were beyond the watchman's hearing. "Did you search the rooms?"

"No," said Gleason; "I just walked through the place, with my flash light. He hadn't been there—I could tell by the way things looked." He handed the lamp to Pinney. "I suppose you'll go back?"

Pinney glanced over his shoulder, and kept on, as O'Halloran was still standing at the corner.

"Yes, I'll wait in his rooms; it's the best chance. He won't see me, of course; there'll be no trouble to hear him coming. If Bill calls you up don't tell him anything that'll make him suspicious. Say I'm working on the theory that Holy's asleep in a cab."

"That's probably where he is," said Gleason.

"He'll come home when he wakes up. For the love of Heaven, Jack, don't get into any trouble with him. Don't go too far. Be careful."

"It's my one great fault," said Pinney, glancing toward the bank again, and halting, for the watchman was out of sight. "I'm too much restrained. I don't go far enough."

CHAPTER XIII

BILL'S DECORUM

AN oily young man sat on a hydrant before the door of a garage and drowsily smoked a cigarette about half past one of the morning. He supposed himself to be alone, but suddenly a deep voice spoke close to his head:

"Can you tell me if Mr. Burgoyne keeps his car here?"

At the first word the young man slid off the hydrant like a frightened cat. Turning, he clung to it for support, strangling with the cigarette which he had nearly swallowed.

"Gee!" he gasped. "I thought you was Gabriel sure."

"Harris is my name," said the inquirer, and repeated his question, at the same time offering an apology for having caused alarm. The apology took the form of a half dollar, and was accepted.

"This is the place, all right," said the young man. "The car's just come in."

"Been out some time?" Bill asked.

"Two or three hours," was the reply. "I guess the chauffeur's there yet. I didn't see him go."

Bill knew that Pinney had telephoned to the garage and had been told that the car was not in use. This would indicate that Nielson had taken a

ride for his own pleasure, and that he was on friendly terms with the man on night duty in the office who had done him a favor by lying in response to Pinney's question.

"I want to see Nielson," said Bill. "Can you show me where he is?"

"Sure!" said the young man, but he failed to do it. Nielson had gone home. It was supposed that he would return about nine in the morning. His address was not on record in the office.

The person in charge there was the same who had responded to Pinney's inquiry; but, after receiving Bill's business card and a few earnest words of advice, he consented to tell the truth as far as he knew it. Between ten and eleven o'clock some one had called Nielson by telephone.

"It might have been Mr. Burgoyne, but I don't think it was. I didn't hear much except Nielson's name, and as he was right here I handed him the phone, and paid no more attention; but I saw him take the car out right away. He was gone an hour or less; then stopped here for half a minute, and went off on a little joy ride. No harm in that; I've heard Mr. Burgoyne tell him he could use the car, but I wouldn't give him away over the telephone to a party I didn't know."

At this the young man who had mistaken Bill for the Angel Gabriel contributed some information. Nielson had taken a girl for a ride. Her name was Minna Engstrom, and she lived on the other side of Eighth Avenue over the bookstore on the corner. Nielson used to know her in the old coun-

try, and was always crazy about her. That was probably why he left home.

"Believe me, you can't blame him. Say, Sweden was never the same after that girl hit the watery trail. It's a wonder they didn't all come over, every Swedish man that had as much as one good lamp in his face. When she walks up Broadway it makes you nervous to hear the men's necks creak. But, of course, Nielson is nothing in her life; she's scouting for something better than to marry a poor gasoline eater. I've tried to wise him up and save him from the nutty house, but the poor dope hears wedding bells in his sleep."

Bill knew already in what form temptation would present itself to Nielson. The eulogy of Miss Engstrom which had just been pronounced was merely corroborative, tending to emphasize the danger. It appeared, however, that Nielson had an almost unique reputation for integrity. The garage man spoke forcibly on this subject when Bill invited a few remarks.

"As honest a boy as ever drove a car," he said. "I'll bet he hasn't grafted ten dollars a month on Mr. Burgoyne since he's had this job. If you're looking for character, there it is; but what would an up-to-date New York girl want of a man like that? There's nothing in it for *her,* as I needn't say to anybody who knows life the way you do, Mr. Harris."

Bill felt that his view of life had been maligned, but he was in no mood for abstract disputation.

"Does Nielson take this lady to ride very often?" he asked.

"Oh, she goes once in a while," said the oily youth. "Mr. Burgoyne's car is a swell looker, and Nielson lets her ride in the rear seat. You understand, Mr. Harris, that girl's got brains just like a man. To-night's the first time I ever saw her up alongside of Nielson."

"Was she?" said the garage man, with interest. "Well, well!"

The indications certainly were bad. Bill suspected that it was Saintsbury who had telephoned to Nielson, and that the resulting interview had been satisfactory to both parties. With a bribe in view, perhaps with a part of it already in hand, Nielson had been encouraged to hear the wedding bells even in a waking moment. He had gone straight to Miss Engstrom, though it was midnight, and apparently he had met with some success.

Bill lightened himself of a few pieces of silver and took his leave. He had gained the assurance that Burgoyne was not using his car. He had got a little light on Nielson's movements that evening, and on his character and situation. Bill was sorry for the young man; doubted that he would have the stomach to go through with this business of perjury, except under Saintsbury's compulsion.

In the frenzy of a love craze, he would promise anything, but his performance might be disappointing to the tempter. Yet Bill regretted very deeply that no written statement had been obtained from Nielson. It should have been done; Bill was more

and more astonished that Jack Pinney should have neglected so obvious a precaution. The interview with Nielson must have run on curious lines. His associates had given him no clear account of it; he would inquire more closely to-morrow.

At the cruel hour of seven next morning Bill rang up the Forty-fifth Street rooms, waking Frank Gleason from wild dreams. Pinney had not appeared; no word had come from him.

"I'm at the office," Bill said. "Clearin' up routine stuff. Call me quick if you find Burgoyne."

"I certainly will," said Gleason, and went back to bed.

Burgoyne was the man upon whom Bill's mind had finally centered its activities, after strenuous pondering briefly interrupted by sleep. Beyond question, Burgoyne's behavior was the puzzle of the case. After a while the door opened, and Mary Leonard, his secretary, paused to say good morning. Immersed in meditation, Bill gazed at the fresh and vivid presence, and thought of a June rosebush growing in a gray wall's shadow.

The girl may be remembered as the daughter of Bill's friend and occasional partner in the old days, Mike Leonard, pardoned out of prison some years ago through the influence of the association, to whose staff he was immediately added. He was now off duty with an illness, but was much better this morning, so Mary said in response to Bill's inquiry. He had sent a message in his usual vein, asking for light work at home, suitable to a convalescent reformer.

"I need you more than him," said Bill. "I'm glad you come so early. You know Holy Burgoyne," he went on. "You've met him here; talked with him quite often. What's your opinion of him?"

"Well," said she, "I like him. I think he's a gentleman."

Bill nodded in approval.

"Thank you, Mary," said he. "That's what I wanted. A gentleman. Keepin' that idea in mind, we'll go over a few things that Mr. Burgoyne has done."

"What has he done?" she asked, with genuine sympathy. "Has he—hurt anybody?"

"Not in a bodily way," Bill replied. "It's a robbery case. Without violence. The Burgoyne pearls showed up yesterday for a minute, and somebody got 'em. The gentleman just named is under suspicion."

Mary was scandalized.

"The Burgoyne pearls belong to Anna Holden," she said. "He couldn't have done *that*. He's in love with her, though I suppose that doesn't make it any worse."

"His motive might 'a' been good," said Bill, and he proceeded to state the situation, avoiding for the moment any mention of Pinney's connection with the case. Upon that partial presentation Mary believed that Burgoyne had taken the pearls, and she thought he had done precisely right.

"So far," said Bill, "I agree. The trouble is that there's an innocent man accused. It might go hard with him an' hurt his friends. Holy makes a weak

bluff o' defendin' him, and then gets drunk an' disappears. Can you see him doin' such a thing as that, Mary?"

"No," said she, "I certainly can't."

"Neither can I," said Bill, "but that's the way it looks. What's worse, the innocent party was a guest o' his, as you might say—was virtually invited into State's prison by Mr. Burgoyne. In a social way."

"I don't believe Mr. Burgoyne took the pearls," said she. "Perhaps he thinks the other man did. But then he'd do something about it. He wouldn't let anybody rob Anna Holden. He'd go straight to that man and half kill him, I should think."

"On the contrary," Bill rejoined, "the accused party has been huntin' for Mr. Burgoyne all night an' can't find him."

"Well," said she, "that shows he's innocent—the other man, I mean."

Having brought her to this conviction, Bill ventured to break the news. She was certain to find it out; he had decided that she would better hear it from him. He stated Pinney's position with strict veracity, and, despite the evidence in his favor, Mary saw him in a vision, covered with ropes of pearls, like an Indian rajah.

"Are you very much worried?" she asked faintly. "Of course, Mr. Pinney wouldn't do such a thing, and I don't see how he could have got them. Do you?"

"I know he didn't," said Bill. "You can tie to that, Mary."

Mr. Burgoyne doesn't tell any story at all," she said, with excellent penetration. "He must have *some* idea of what happened to the pearls. If he's disappeared, I think he's gone after somebody—the real thief. Probably he means to get the pearls himself; not to sell them, of course, but for Miss Holden's sake."

"That means secrecy," said Bill. "Where does it leave Mr. Pinney? There's the stone wall. Would he sacrifice Mr. Pinney to her interests? As a gentleman."

"He couldn't. That would make her a party to it. If he took the pearls himself, he must have *meant* to put the blame on Mr. Pinney. Otherwise he wouldn't have let him ride in the car. I can't believe he'd do any of these things. He *must* suspect somebody else."

"I agree," said Bill. "I figure that he didn't know the pearls were gone. Not till the finish. He thought they was in the box when he took it to the Plaza."

"Yes," said she, "I think so. But at the last minute he couldn't bring himself to let her have them. He knew she meant to sell them and marry a man he didn't approve of. I don't believe it was jealousy alone."

"No," said Bill, "it was the man. His character. Holy knows him, an' has passed him up; but I can't find that he's ever said so to her. There's my only good card, Mary. I've looked 'em over durin' the night, an' it's all I got to draw to. That man is Holy's rival, as you'd see it in a book. Now it sticks in my mind that there's a rule in this matter.

Among gentlemen. Suppose two of 'em love the same girl. Ain't it barred for one to bring a scandalous charge against the other? On anything short of cold certainty?"

"Yes," said she.

"It's what you'd call an obligation of honor, very bindin' on the right party. Now, then, Mary, you and I have figured it out that Holy must suspect somebody. Suppose it's his rival. While uncertain, he can't speak. He even has to let Jack Pinney take his medicine till he gets the other party dead to rights, an' can rule him off the course."

"Why didn't he give a hint that he suspected somebody? He needn't have named him."

"Too open," said Bill. "Mrs. Clarendon would have got right on to it."

"I see," she said. "The other man might naturally be suspected. He was one of a very few who knew about the pearls."

"He was right in line. Bein' in doubt, Mr. Burgoyne would go out of his way to defend him, rather than give a hint."

"Could Miss Holden have told this man to take the pearls?"

"No. She don't know he got 'em. I saw her after she'd talked with him. It's a thousand to one he squealed poverty an' broke off the match. Mr. Burgoyne seems to have had him sized up proper. For a wolf. What's the matter, Mary? Did I frighten you? You went pale."

"I was thinking—suppose Mr. Burgoyne has found that man? What would have happened?"

Bill had been thinking of that himself, but he considerately evaded expressing an opinion.

"I guess Holy didn't find him." he said. "I'll have to do that myself." He laid a hand on the morning's mail. "I'll leave these to you. There's a few notes pinned to 'em. I want to say you've helped me a good deal; given me confidence. I was only guessin' till I talked it over with you. Now I got the game where it'll run easy. You can say that to Mr. Pinney, if he comes in."

This was designed for her encouragement, as she understood, but she accepted it as honest coin. In the old New England phrase, she had summered and wintered Mr. Harris, and her trust in him had never been destroyed by cheerful lying. Her one fear was that he might be deceived through reliance in Mr. Pinney, an error of which she herself would never have been guilty.

There were times when she partly believed in Mr. Gleason, and in the present case it never occurred to her to think of him with uneasiness; but the dark, shrewd countenance of the other haunted her after Mr. Harris was gone. She saw Pinney's slender, beautiful hands moving in those tricks of parlor magic with which he occasionally entertained her, and it seemed easy for him to have stolen the pearls. She had as much faith in his wits and skill as Mrs. Clarendon had, and as little in his reformation; wherefore, he was the terror of her life, and the constant subject of her prayers—to the effect that he would disengage his talents from the cause of reform and devote them to another line of business.

CHAPTER XIV

AT DI SENTI'S HOME

THE talents of Jack Pinney had faded out of the case, in the mind of Bill Harris. The more he thought about the clew which he had found in the character and conduct of Holy Burgoyne, the better he liked it. He decided to follow it a little way before going to the garage in search of Nielson, and the first step was to investigate Burgoyne's account of what had occurred at Seitz's.

The easiest theory was that Burgoyne had not opened the box, but had invented that incident with the generous design of protecting Rhinehart, and as part of what had seemed at first to be his definite procedure—clearing everybody except himself. But Bill was now looking for some one who had been protected for a special reason, a particular obligation of chivalry, and it was not possible to make the description fit Piggy Rhinehart.

Count di Senti was a more romantic figure, but there was nothing to show that Miss Holden had any social acquaintance with him. The fact that she had given him her message for Burgoyne did not imply a confidential relation; it might mean no more than that she wouldn't trust Rhinehart to deliver it.

Seitz's was open for business when Bill arrived, but the only person who might have been mistaken

for a customer was the private detective of the establishment, Jacob Weed, an ex-sergeant of police.

"Hello, Bill," said he. "How's Mike Leonard? I heard he was off his feed?"

"Yes," Bill said, "but he's improving."

"And the other two? Pinney and Gleason? Do you notice any improvement in *them?*"

"They're both doin' well," Bill answered gravely.

"That's grand," Weed said. "Not even Jack Pinney has wearied in well-doing. I call that fine. I'll go further; it's miraculous."

"Speaking of miracles," Bill rejoined, "I'm hoping you'll do me a favor; and be careful not to mention it. This is very private, Jack."

"Your insinuation is uncalled for, Bill. I'm the original dumb man, and you know it. Spill your trouble."

"I want to inquire about certain parties, not reflectin' on them in any way," Bill said. "You know Holy Burgoyne? He was here yesterday afternoon."

The detective happened to have noticed Burgoyne especially, but the manner of his response was intended to indicate that he was equally or even better informed on every other possible subject of inquiry within his field.

"Yes, Mr. Burgoyne was here," said he, "from five to about five-twenty. Of course, a man like that isn't one of my troubles, but I lamp them all, good and bad. He came in by the Avenue door, and his car pulled around to the side street. I saw him speak to Count di Senti for half a minute, and

then go into Mr. Rhinehart's room. When he came out he had a parcel under his arm."

"Did he come out of Mr. Rhinehart's room?"

"No. Di Senti's."

"Was the count with him?"

"No. He was somewhere in the back part of the store."

"Has anybody shown up yet, today?"

"Mr. Rhinehart's in his room. It's too early for the count."

The two private offices were toward the rear, with windows on the cross street. The partitions were of wood, about halfway up, then glass to the ceiling. Beyond them was an employees' stairway leading to the basement, and near the head of it there was a door opening into Di Senti's room which had three entrances including the one in the partition separating it from Rhinehart's. Because of this construction—which Bill was aware of—somebody might have entered Di Senti's office while Burgoyne was there, without being seen except by persons in the extreme rearward parts of the establishment.

"Do you know Miss Anna Holden?" Bill inquired.

"Yes," said Weed. "I've seen her here with Mr. Burgoyne, and with Mrs. Clarendon."

"Ever alone?"

"Yesterday forenoon," said the detective, "and once or twice before, in the last few days."

"What did she do?"

"What they all do," responded Weed, with a faint smile. "Talked with the count. He's the ladies' man, you know."

"Are the count's hours pretty regular?" Bill inquired. "Is he here all day?"

"He used to be," Weed replied, "but for the last two months he's been out a good deal, especially in the afternoon. I'm probably not supposed to know why, but I do. We're still getting family jewels from abroad—mostly from France. Some of them are not publicly shown here. Di Senti is talking them up with his swell acquaintances."

Here was a valuable piece of information, showing that Di Senti and Miss Holden might have had opportunities of meeting. Mrs. Clarendon would probably have kept track of the young woman in the evenings, but not so carefully in the afternoons.

Bill found Rhinehart alone, and very nervous. His greeting, however, was cordial.

"Mr. Harris! Well, I'm certainly glad you called! Sit down and tell me what you know about those pearls."

Bill had come to receive, not to impart, information, and he opened up by questioning Burgoyne's story.

"Mr. Burgoyne told the truth, so far as I know," Rhinehart softly squealed. "There's absolutely nothing more to say about what occurred down here. I gave him the pearls, and he went into Di Senti's room and shut the door after him."

"What did he go in there for?" Bill asked.

"To look at the pearls: I knew that. He might have done it here without offending me any, but that wouldn't be Holy. He hates anything business-like. He made the excuse that he wanted to tele-

phone. I offered him this instrument, but he saw that I was busy at my desk, and he pretended that he didn't wish to disturb me."

"You didn't hear him telephone?"

"No."

"Any voices?"

"Not a sound; but he might have used the phone without my hearing him. The door was shut. I'll find out whether he asked for a call."

In response to an inquiry the girl at the private switchboard said that a gentleman had called the Hotel Plaza from Count di Senti's room at the hour named, but before the connection was obtained he had said: "Never mind."

This indicated to Bill that Burgoyne had meant to tell Miss Holden that he was bringing the pearls to her, but that he had decided against it. This was the same reluctance which had finally halted him and turned him back at the door of the hotel.

"Di Senti looked in while Burgoyne was here, didn't he?" Bill inquired.

"Yes, for a moment, and then went out again. He asked a business question—nothing to do with the pearls."

"He didn't follow Burgoyne into the other room?"

"No; he went out the way he came. What are you driving at, Mr. Harris?"

"One more question," said Bill. "If you please. When Miss Holden brought the candy box down here, did she give it to you?"

"She left it on the top of this desk."

"Had it stayed there long?"

"Till I heard from Mr. Saintsbury in the afternoon. Then I put the pearls into it and set it in my private safe."

"Where'd you have lunch?"

"In the Flatiron Building. I don't see the point of that, Mr. Harris."

"I was thinkin' what chance there was for somebody to fix up a duplicate box," said Bill. "There seems to have been plenty."

Rhinehart protested that the idea was absurd.

"You're trying to make a case against Di Senti," he said. "It won't work."

"When is Di Senti due?" Bill asked.

"He won't be here to-day," Rhinehart replied. "He's going out of town on business. Oh, it's only a trip to Great Neck. He'll be back this evening."

"What's his address?"

Rhinehart fretted, parleyed, and advised, but he gave the address. He confessed to being all upset by this affair, but chiefly on Bill's account.

"It hurts me to see you making this terrible mistake," he declared. "You don't realize how friendly we all are to you, Bill Harris. Your association is the real stuff; it does a lot of good, but its reputation has to be above reproach. One bad scandal means disaster, just as it did with a young woman in society twenty years ago—well, perhaps longer than that, but you're old enough to remember how things used to be. Now, take my advice, Bill; go straight to Jack Pinney. He's got those pearls, and you ought to be sharp enough to

see it. Hold him up, good and strong. That's your only way out of this."

Bill thanked him for his friendly advice, and abstained from contradiction, beyond a necessary word in defense of Pinney. This duty discharged, he took his leave, postponing certain inquiries about Di Senti till a later hour.

At the place of the count's residence, Bill found a swarthy young Levantine at the telephone switchboard in an alcove off the entrance hall. He was quarreling with a tenant upstairs while another vainly rang the bell of the elevator. At Bill's question he shut off the person on the wire and tried to call Di Senti. There was no answer.

"When did he go out?" Bill asked, but the Levantine had no information. He had neither seen nor heard Di Senti, but supposed that he had walked down the stairs.

The youth went aloft by way of the elevator, and Bill followed afoot as far as the third floor. There were two apartments on each side of the hall, Di Senti's being at the front. Bill pushed a button and the sound of a bell came to him, but he heard no movement of any person within.

He felt that it was essential to see these rooms. Suspicion of Di Senti had taken a firm grip of his mind, he was persuaded that Burgoyne had formed the same opinion, and had come to this place as soon as he was free of Saintsbury. It was improbable that he had found any one here, for Di Senti must have been with Miss Holden at that time, by Bill's reckoning; but Burgoyne might have

waited, and a scene might have ensued which would have left its record.

There were possibilities which seemed to justify an immediate search, even in default of legal warrant, and Bill laid his hand on the knob.

To his surprise the door opened. There was nothing to hold the bolt of the lock. All that had formerly held it had been pushed back out of the door-frame and had fallen to the floor.

In the little vestibule and through the open doors of the darkened rooms on each side, nothing was to be seen that strongly called the attention, and Bill paused for a moment to examine the broken woodwork. It had been defective originally, and was rotten besides. A child could have forced the door. Bill closed it and went into the bed-room, which was on the right.

The bed was undisturbed; there was no unusual disorder in the room. Two drawers in a dresser were open, and the contents had been pulled about a bit, as if a man had looked for a tie or a handkerchief in a hurry. Dark-green shades were drawn at the windows.

Adjoining this room, and occupying the space behind the vestibule, was a kitchenette, in which there was an electric lamp turned on. The place was somewhat untidy, with soiled dishes on the table. A newspaper lay under it, and on the paper was an odd kitchen knife with a pointed blade about four inches long. Bill picked it up. It stuck to the paper, with a smear of blood.

Beyond the kitchenette was an alcove which might

have been intended for a dining room, but was not furnished for that use. It had an inlaid floor of light-colored wood, and there was no rug. On this floor, near the threshold of the sitting room, was a quantity of blood which might almost be dignified by the classic term, a pool. Some one had lain there, wounded.

A few faint red marks on door frames and walls seemed to have been made by a person unsteadily moving rearward, and they led Bill to the bath, which opened from the far side of the bedroom. Here he found bloodstains on the marble around the bowl. Two handkerchiefs bearing Di Senti's crest had been used in washing the wound. They were now almost dry—stiffened and pink. A fine shirt, doubtless snatched from the dresser, had been torn for bandages.

Bill returned to the vestibule, and looked again at the broken lock, hoping to find it stronger than he had supposed. On the contrary, it seemed weaker, on this second view. The person who had forced the door might not have meant to do so. The weight of a body flung against it in mere anger and impatience would have been enough. As for anything that could be called a plan, it might have been formed afterward.

Perhaps Di Senti was in the sitting room, with a closed door between him and the vestibule. There would have been very little noise; he might not have heard it. The person who had gained entrance so easily must have gone softly round by the other way, through the bedroom and into the little kitchen,

where the knife had probably been lying on the table, waiting, as they sometimes will, to catch and hold the eye, nothing else visible but just that knife.

Probably she didn't know why she took it, or what she was going to do with it. Di Senti saw her coming, with the knife in her hand; he came to meet her; perhaps made the error of trying to take the knife. It was all over in an instant. He staggered back, probably not falling at once. She turned away, not in flight, not terrified, just dazed. When she knew that the knife was still in her hand she let it fall with a shudder and walked on, out of the house.

To read a woman into this scene was the last thing that Bill would have wished to do, but he could not help it. There was no sign of a struggle between two men. Nowhere in the rooms was there a piece of furniture overturned. The polished floor of the alcove showed only one small scratch, possibly made by a person's foot that had slid a trifle while a hard blow was being struck. On that floor Bill found a little brass hook which seemed to have been torn out of the molding alongside the door that opened to the kitchenette. It might reward further study, and he put it into his pocket.

There was a sideboard in the alcove, a beautiful piece adorned with the most delicate glassware. One tumbler of the largest size seemed to have been used last evening, and beside it stood an open bottle of brandy. The cork lay near, with a corkscrew still

fast in it. A good quantity of brandy was missing from the bottle.

Bill viewed it with considerable attention. It might fit into the case, along with the note which Burgoyne had written to Mrs. Clarendon. There was no chance whatever that Burgoyne had attacked Di Senti with a knife or had left him lying, wounded. The odds were a thousand to one that he had not been present when the thrust was given; but he might have come afterward. That would explain the single apparent contradiction in the evidence.

If Di Senti had dropped in his tracks from a stab wound, and had lain helpless long enough to lose so much blood, how could he have had the strength to care for himself so well when he revived, and to go out alone to search for surgical assistance? It was much more probable that he had not done these things unaided.

If Burgoyne had found him, all the pieces of the puzzle would fit together neatly—including the brandy bottle. Perhaps the corkscrew had hung on the hook beside the door. Burgoyne would have taken Di Senti to some physician's house or to some private hospital, and would have left him just long enough to write the note to Mrs. Clarendon—with a bottle of brandy at his elbow. Then he would have returned to Di Senti, never to leave him till the man was surely out of danger.

Every detail of the affair stood forth as clear as day, with one exception: what had become of the pearls? Bill had a vision of that little bag Miss Holden carried when she made her stricken entrance

into Mrs. Clarendon's room. He hoped the pearls were in it, but there were two other possibilities: Holy might have found them or they might still be hidden in this apartment. If Burgoyne had found them, they must have lain conspicuous, for a search made under such conditions would have left the rooms in ruins.

There were several cabinets and lockfast places, some accessible to any hand, and others calling for the exercise of a peculiar talent. Bill opened them all, and found no pearls. In the drawer of a desk were three photographs of Anna Holden, lying unregarded, in a wilderness of unpaid bills. An inscription to Di Senti, in Italian, very moderately sentimental by what Bill could make of it, was written on the back of one of the pictures. None were framed. The count had wasted neither thought nor money on these photographs, and Bill was glad to know that they had been treated in this manner, tossed out of sight. Something grateful, akin to prayer, was in his heart, for the girl's sake.

He put the pictures into his pocket, and gave his attention to another portrait expensively framed and favorably stationed on the desk, so that the original might be flattered by the sight of it whenever she called. She was an Italian, a singer, as Bill judged. He took her out of the frame and pocketed her, not in the same place with the others.

Continuing his search, he kept an eye open for any writing similar to that on the back of Anna's photograph, with the amiable design of suppressing it. He found neither that nor anything else that in-

terested him, till he had almost exhausted the possibilities of the apartment and had come, last of all, to a tin bread box on the top shelf of a cupboard in the little kitchen. The box contained no bread and no pearls, nothing but candy.

Chocolates and bonbons in the bread box, the quality superior and the condition very fresh. There could be no doubt about the meaning of this. Barring the pearls themselves, Bill couldn't have asked for anything better. There should be no trouble now in making a case against Di Senti.

Bill wrapped some samples of the candy in a bit of paper and went toward the sitting room to get a photograph of the count from a frame matching the one which had held the woman's picture. The blood on the floor halted him, and he considered, with an undivided mind, the position of Anna Holden.

In spite of the evidence before his eyes, Bill doubted that Di Senti's wound was dangerous. He had walked out of the house on his own feet, though probably assisted by Burgoyne, who would know the truth and would save the man, if money could do it. In the event of his recovery he would make no complaint; he would buy with his silence immunity in the matter of the pearls.

It seemed right to be kind to this unfortunate girl and cover her transgression, especially in view of the uncertainty as to the real nature of her act. She might have had extreme jusification; she might have come upon Di Senti at a moment when the pearls were in his hands or lying on a table. What would he have done in such circumstances? Possibly

the knife had not been brought from the kitchen. It might have lain convenient to a sudden need of self-defense.

If Miss Holden was to have the benefit of a doubt, something must be done immediately and here, otherwise the police would have the case within a few hours. Bill went to the outer door of the apartment and softly opened it. Two maids were talking on the second floor above; probably they were working downward through the house. While listening, he examined the broken woodwork. It could be mended well enough with a few small screws and a touch of mucilage for the splinters.

An hour later, when the maid came, she noticed nothing wrong with Count di Senti's door, but she did observe that the gentleman had dropped a bottle of claret in the dining room. Slivers of glass were on the floor, in a great red stain, and the bulk of the bottle was in the wastebasket. It seemed a pity that this good wine should be gone, and no one the happier. The maid was affected by regret, and she took a longer drink than usual out of the large decanter on the north end of the sideboard.

"*That* wasn't wasted, anyhow, praised be the saints!" said she piously.

CHAPTER XV

THE CASE AGAINST THE COUNT

BILL had descended the stairs, unobserved, while the elevator was aloft. In the cellar he found the janitor and the night hallman who slept in an unused storeroom, and had no other home. The janitor knew nothing material. The hallman gave one bit of information. He had not seen Di Senti since he rode away in a cab, early last evening, but there was somebody in the count's apartment about eleven o'clock. A man had used the telephone, calling up a garage. As to what was said, the attendant knew nothing.

Had an automobile come to the door shortly afterwards? No; he hadn't seen any. It seemed clear that Burgoyne had taken Di Senti away in his car which Nielson had been instructed to bring to a point not too near the house. It was easily possible that the exits and entrances of all persons concerned in this action had escaped the hall-man's eye. The street door was unlocked till midnight.

The meagerness of this information was bad for Bill but it was good for Miss Holden, and on the whole he was gratified. He called up Mrs. Clarendon to ask how the girl was getting along, and received the surprising and unwelcome news that Miss Holden

was probably on the ten o'clock express, going back to Cambridge.

"She left while I was asleep," the lady said. "Mr. Saintsbury'll go mad. Have you heard anything of Mr. Burgoyne?" "No," said Bill; but there's matters I'd like to speak about. When could I see you?"

"Come whenever you can," came the vivacious reply.

"I'll be there in about an hour. Or more," he added somewhat hastily.

Cautious inquiry, at a candy shop midway between Di Senti's home and Seitz's, disclosed the fact that Di Senti was not known by name, but his countenance had dwelt in the memory of a salesgirl since yesterday about one o'clock, when she had sold him a five-pound box of chocolates and bonbons. From the moment when she saw his photograph she was clear as to every detail of the transaction.

This bit of business was so quickly done that Bill had time to visit Seitz's, where he found Rhinehart much perturbed and puzzled.

"I've just been talking with Great Neck," said he. "Di Senti isn't there, and he hasn't sent any word that he was coming. The arrangement was that he should telephone from New York before starting. Do you know anything about it?"

Bill contemplated one of Rhinehart's plump knees with a steady and penetrating stare that might have given a sensitive man an attack of rheumatism.

"There's certain things known by me," he said; "as to past matters. Forget 'em. I'm usin' no pressure. I'll take your plain word not to lay my

evidence before Saintsbury. Do I get your word, Rhinehart?"

"Oh, Lord, yes!" the little man replied. "What's your evidence?"

Bill disclosed the matter of the candy and the fact of Di Senti's absence from home during the night. As to other discoveries in the case he was silent.

"I've learned that Di Senti brought a satchel when he came back here about half past one yesterday," he said. "The duplicate candy box must 'a' been in it. All fixed up. He told Burgoyne to go into his room after gettin' the pearls. I figure that the boxes were changed while Burgoyne was there. Maybe we can find out how it was done."

Rhinehart led the way into the other room, which was furnished to meet the tastes of luxurious women. Bill noticed that the telephone was not attached to Di Senti's desk, but was on a table where women who might ask to use it would not have the opportunity to read any documents and correspondence of the firm which might be lying open to a wandering and not too scrupulous eye.

Bill asked leave to open the desk, and Rhinehart started toward his own room for a key; but before the little man had taken three steps the lid was rolling up. Rhinehart would have sworn that Bill picked the lock with the end of his finger.

"It squeaks," Bill said. "That might have given the game away. I figure that the duplicate box was inside. Burgoyne would have opened the right one on the leaf and have tied it up again. Then, while

he was telephonin', the shift would have been made by Di Senti."

"Awful risk," Rhinehart said, his shrill voice breaking with excitement. "Do you think he did it?"

"Come here," said Bill, pointing into the desk with his finger. Rhinehart approached and saw a thin streak of oil that had run down the wood from the groove in which the top slid.

"Oiled yesterday," Bill said. "To cure the squeak. An' a poor job, too."

Rhinehart made no attempt to controvert the evidence. He asked what could be done. Was there a chance of covering this thing up? Saintsbury certainly didn't want publicity.

"I got reason to believe no criminal charge'll ever be made," Bill said. "Now tell me: Is Di Senti a partner here?"

"No; he gets a salary, and commissions on certain sales."

"Why can't he pay his bills?"

Rhinehart squirmed for a few moments, and then came out with the truth.

"Di Senti stung me for twenty thousand," he said. "Lost it in Wall Street. I didn't want to prosecute; I wanted my money; and the count is a useful man, besides. I kept him on the job, and I've been making him pay back what he stole, on damn hard terms. Good for him, too, I thought."

"Would you give him another chance?"

Rhinehart squirmed again.

"I'd have to," said he at last. "Couldn't afford

to do otherwise. But the next arrangement won't be mere slavery. I'll make him wear a ball and chain on his hind leg, if I have him here again."

"Well," said Bill, addressing a large ring on Rhinehart's finger, "that wouldn't be my way. Treat him decent or let him alone, unless you *want* to be stung, once in so often."

At the Plaza, Bill found Mrs. Clarendon entirely ready to receive him. His news astounded and, to some extent, humiliated her. Even with the evidence of the photographs before her she was reluctant to believe that any secret understanding had existed between Anna and Di Senti.

"I never saw the slightest sign of it," she declared. "Certainly I am growing old and dull, or Anna is a genius in deception."

This was before Bill had disclosed the more alarming aspect of the case. He said nothing of Di Senti's wound until he had prepared the lady's mind with the gentlest intentions and with the kind of ingenuity which enabled him to comprehend the nature of delicate machinery. He built up his theory of self-defense under her eyes without letting her suspect that any violence was to be excused, and when the bloodstains came grimly into the story they were already justified so far as that was possible.

He carefully presented the whole case against Anna as conjectural. The count's rooms were as accessible as Central Park. What visitors he had had last evening still remained to be learned. The attack upon Di Senti seemed to have been the act of a woman, but Miss Holden was not the only one who

might have done it; and with that he showed the photograph which he had taken from the frame.

"I know her," said Mrs. Clarendon, and gave him the singer's name. At the same time there came to her the memory of Anna's interest in this woman, and instead of being relieved by the entry of Teresa Campanari into the case, Mrs. Clarendon was the more alarmed, but, being a thoroughbred, she kept cool.

"This is all perfectly consistent," she said at last, "and we must act upon the supposition that it's true, until we know the contrary. But I suppose that a person of your peculiar gifts can't have overlooked one point."

She paused, and Bill, who had apparently been memorizing the pattern of the rug, looked up into her face.

"You mean Mr. Burgoyne. Ten words from him could upset the whole case."

"You said it, Bill. Suppose he tells you, positively and truly, that the pearls were not stolen by Di Senti. Suppose he went to Di Senti's rooms to get a bit of evidence, possibly against Piggy Rhinehart, and found the door broken and the man stabbed. Suppose Di Senti wasn't able or willing to talk about it, and relapsed into unconsciousness when Holy got him to a doctor's.

"Holy suspects Anna, if you please; and what does he do? He waits by Di Senti's bedside, as long as may be necessary, determined to hear what the man says, if he ever speaks a rational word again. At this very moment he may be speaking that word, and

Holy may come straight here and tell us that Anna's name didn't enter into the story."

"I couldn't hear anything more welcome," Bill responded. "An' I admit that no play is safe till we find Mr. Burgoyne. Still there's points you haven't covered. There's the candy."

"You believe that Di Senti got another box, and put those tools into it," said she. "Then he changed one for the other. But Anna tells me positively that it is the same box. She knows it by a mark of some sort."

"Marks might be imitated," said Bill. "But we come right back to the same spot. Mr. Burgoyne must be found before anybody's mind'll be easy."

"I suppose the ordinary inquiries are useless," she said. "He hasn't taken Di Senti to any public place."

"No," said Bill; "more likely to some doctor's house. Who'd it be? Can you think o' one that he could trust for silence?"

Mrs. Clarendon was wholly at a loss. She knew virtually nothing of Burgoyne's intimates in the medical profession, if he had any. She had never known him to be ill, and she was sure he would have reposed no confidence in any of the doctors who had attended his aunt.

"I'm goin' to see Nielson," said Bill, "if I can find him. There's no chance of his tellin' where Mr. Burgoyne is, but he might take a message."

"Shall I write one? But what could I put on paper that would be safe? He may have gone to a stranger, and have hidden his own name and Di

Senti's. I shouldn't dare either to address or sign a note, especially if a stupid fellow like Nielson is to be the messenger."

"My advice is, no writin'," said Bill. "We better break into his game very cautious, at the start. I don't want to frighten you, but we ought to look at the facts. Mr. Burgoyne is a very reckless man, an', what's worse, he wasn't sober. Suppose Di Senti died in the car five minutes after he was put into it. Suspectin' how he came by his wound, what would Mr. Burgoyne do with the remains? That's why I'll ask no help of anybody outside the association in this hunt."

"At any rate, we can find Anna. Do you think I'd better go to Cambridge?"

"Not yet," said he. "Can you telephone to somebody in Boston, askin' him to meet the train? A trustworthy party. Have him get Miss Holden to call you up. If he finds her."

"You think she may not have gone to Cambridge."

"Well," said he, "we better be sure."

The trustworthy person was called up and instructed as to what was required of him. Bill took his leave, promising to return, if possible, before the hour when Miss Holden's response might be expected.

CHAPTER XVI

THE SWEDISH MESSENGER

AT the garage, Bill was so fortunate as to find Nielson, who had come in a little while ago, for the first appearance of the day, and had been tinkering the car a bit. He had washed his hands, and was drying them, grinning in little spasms and communing joyously with his own countenance in a mirror above the bowl. He turned away just as Bill emerged from the office, where he had been observing the young man through a glass panel of the door.

It was evident that Nielson recognized him instantly, doubtless from snatches of description which he had overheard. The self-complacent grin vanished suddenly, and for a moment the chauffeur looked as if he had suddenly found himself riding full tilt into a collision. Bill greeted him in the mildest possible terms, but the rumble of that voice went over Nielson like a ten-ton dray.

"I want to find Mr. Burgoyne," said Bill. "Can you tell me where he is?"

"No, sir," Nielson replied in a breathless tone, "I can't do it."

"You mean he don't want you to?" said Bill. "I think you're wrong. How long will it take you to go and ask him?"

"No use," said Nielson. "Mr. Burgoyne don't tell

where he is. He'll say, yust wait. Everything going to be all right."

"Was that what he told you to say to Mr. Pinney?"

"Yes, sir. Yust only that. Everything be all right by Saturday afternoon."

"Didn't he say any more afterward?" said Bill. "You met him with the car late in the evening. You took him and another party to a certain place. Did Mr. Burgoyne give you any other word for me? Or for Mr. Pinney?"

"No, sir. Yust the same. Now you got all I can say."

There seemed no valid reason why Nielson should not take a message, but he stubbornly refused. At the same time he intimated that there were no orders to the contrary; he could go whenever he pleased.

"Why would I do it?" he said at last, pawing the floor very hard. "Nothing in it for *me*."

Bill's jaw bit off the head of an imaginary spike, and he swallowed it with difficulty. Communication with Burgoyne *must* be established, however. Bill was in no position to take an indefinite and second-hand assurance that everything was all right. He could not drift on toward Saturday afternoon in ignorance of what Burgoyne was doing, and of what part he would play in the final scene with Saintsbury. Aside from Bill's own desperate need of certainty as to the pearls and as to Holy's intentions, the position of Anna Holden was sufficient ground for rejecting an overscrupulous policy.

"Take my message," said Bill, "an' you'll get what's right."

"No, sir," Nielson replied respectfully, but firmly. "I t'ink I don't do him that way. I ban in United States most two years. I learn pretty fast. What makes the price of gasoline? Somebody got it all. Yes? You want to say something with Mr. Burgoyne? All right. Yust the same."

"I see," said Bill. "You're the Communication Trust."

"Yes, sir," said Nielson, with a tremulous smile. "Got it all."

Bill bit off the head of a somewhat larger spike, and suggested one hundred dollars as a monopoly price in this affair. Nielson showed disappointment faintly brightened by hope. He inquired what the message would be.

"Tell him I know what happened in a certain place," Bill replied. "I want to help him. He better not handle this alone. That's my advice. I'll act strictly confidential. Give him my word for that."

The Swede was wagging his head, as if the message did not comport with his own information or opinions.

"No good," he said. "No use." But he declined to explain.

"Tell him Mrs. Clarendon wants a word from him," said Bill. "She's alone an' worryin' a good deal, not knowin' where he is. Also, how soon can I see him, an' where?"

It was unnecessary to include any question as to the pearls, for if Burgoyne was capable of under-

standing anything, he would know what was desired in that matter.

Nielson repeated the whole of the message in his own way, but with sufficient accuracy; then he politely refused to take it. Supposing that it was now a question of money, Bill raised his bid till it touched five hundred dollars, but Nielson would not come to an agreement.

"No, sir," he said. "Better not."

By this time he was sweating at every pore, and Bill decided to let him cool off.

"You're doin' wrong," said Bill. "Think it over. You can call me up at my office in half an hour."

It was approaching two o'clock, at which hour, by instructions left with Mary Leonard for transmission, if possible, Pinney and Gleason were to await Bill at the association for a conference on the case. Miss Leonard had succeeded in getting word to them, and they were in the office which they shared when Bill arrived, sore from his interview with the obstinate Swede.

Pinney was lying on a couch, while Gleason paced the floor like a lion whose dinner time had been forgotten by the keeper. A strenuous discussion had been in progress, of matters not to be mentioned in Bill's presence, nor was it prudent to let him see the evidences of a too acute anxiety.

"I'm trying to get some sleep, Bill," said Pinney. "Frank, as you'll notice, is kindly rocking the house for me, and still I can't rest. I shut my eyes and count the Burgoyne pearls jumping over a stone wall, but the drowsy god declines to be invoked."

"Bill, look pleasant," Gleason said. "We may all be in jail in a few days."

"Go easy," Bill responded. "I need to be rubbed with a soft paw. I've just been thrown heavy. By the Swede."

No news could have been more welcome, but there was nothing to be read in Pinney's countenance except the natural questioning interest and the loyalty that backs a partner when the game goes ill.

"We've been thrown as hard as yourself, Bill," he said. "If Burgoyne has left a trail, we haven't found it. Have you had any luck?"

Bill gave the gist of his discoveries, ending with the Swede's refusal to take a message. When the nature of that conversation was made clear to Pinney, he got briskly to his feet.

"We understand, Bill," said he. "It's a still hunt among the doctors, and not a minute to be lost. Come on, Frank; we'll get busy."

There was something spirited and thrilling in the way he spoke. All signs of his sleepless night and wearying disappointment vanished. Bill's iron vitals were warmed by a sense of comradeship, and by admiration of this alacrity and intelligence. As to the intelligence, Bill was giving Pinney only his due, without perceiving the manner of its operation at this juncture. Gleason, however, had smelled a rat.

"What bit you, Jack?" he asked, when they had left the office.

"The Swede has stung Bill for five hundred," Pinney replied. "He's going to take that message.

Don't you see? He turned the offer down merely to throw Bill off and prevent being followed."

"Perfectly plain, of course," said Gleason, half persuading himself that he had really suspected it. "But what's the use? He won't go afoot, my son; and do you think you can follow that car of Holy's in a taxi?"

"I'll find something that'll follow it," Pinney responded. "Go up to the garage, Frank, and keep Nielson there till I can get on the job. This is a sure thing, I tell you. We'll land Holy and the goods."

"Holy, perhaps; but I'll bet you'll be no nearer to the pearls."

"Is that so?" Pinney rejoined. "If Burgoyne hasn't got them, who has?"

"I suppose you mean Miss Holden."

"Well," said Pinney, "it won't be very hard to find her."

Gleason made no further comments, and went on his errand, only to find that the chauffeur had gone, though not in the car. He had got it ready, however, and the supposition was that he would return presently and take it out. Gleason waited a few minutes, and then kept watch from the Broadway corner, till Pinney hove in sight, alone, in a small, fast car. A pointed beard by way of disguise supplemented the goggles through which his eyes shone like lamps.

He declined to be in the least discouraged by Gleason's report. The Swede would not have gone so soon with his message to Burgoyne; more prob-

ably he would wait till evening, and would use the car, leaving it at a safe distance from the place.

"I'll handle this matter, Frank," he said; and they made plans for communication and for concerted action if that should be necessary.

About the same time Bill was in Mrs. Clarendon's apartments, and the lady was receiving a message from Boston. Miss Holden had not arrived by the express leaving New York at ten o'clock. The gentleman would meet later trains, if Mrs. Clarendon desired him to do so, and this offer was very thankfully accepted.

Bill spent the remainder of the afternoon and most of the evening in labors whose results were too meager to be chronicled. He heard from Mrs. Clarendon that Miss Holden had not reached Boston. No encouraging news came to him from any source.

Pinney was occupied from six o'clock till half past one in pursuing Burgoyne's automobile. He learned that Miss Minna Engstrom was very handsomely entertained, with dinner and a long ride afterward, and then a bit of supper, but aside from this the whiskered gentleman in the fast car gained no information. He was perfectly sure, however, that the Swede took no message to Burgoyne that night.

Next morning, shortly after nine, Nielson presented himself at the office of the association and sent his name to Bill. The spacious elegance of the offices, the suggestion of mystery, and finally the solemn dignity of Mr. Harris, seated as the central and controlling genius of the place, affected Nielson so deeply that he could barely stand, but could not

be induced to take the liberty of sitting down, when he was asked into the presence of the local manager.

"Well," he gasped finally, "I done it! I took the message."

"When?" Bill queried, but the Swede was silent. Bill laid five one-hundred-dollar notes on the desk, with a heavy steel paper-weight superimposed.

"When did you take the message?"

Nielson eyed the money.

"Yust as soon as you was gone away," he said.

It was what Bill was prepared to hear.

"All right," he said. "Now give me the answer."

"Well, sir," Nielson was panting like a dog, "I got to do the best what I can. Pretty hard to understand."

"What Mr. Burgoyne said?"

"Yes, sir. But he said, don't do anything. Yust wait till Saturday. All right for everybody, then."

"Did he tell you anything about the pearls?"

"Yes, oh, yes." Nielson's face brightened. "He don't know anything. Not where they are, but he will, before Saurday in the afternoon."

"Is he waiting for somebody to tell him?"

The Swede hesitated, as if this were a little further than he was authorized to go. Bill tapped the money, and Nielson spoke with a gulp:

"Yes, sir. Mr. Di Senti."

"He was there? Did you see him?"

"No, sir. In another room. He's doing fine; be all right by Saturday, Mr. Burgoyne said." Nielson hurried on. "Mrs. Clarendon not to worry; not to

be afraid about Miss Holden. She's only keeping away from Mr. Saintsbury. That's all."

"It ain't much," Bill said, but the Swede argued that this was not his fault; he had got all he could; he was concealing nothing. Bill failed to get any more out of him.

The paper-weight was slowly lifted, and the money paid.

"I hate to give you this. I'm doin' you a harm, an' I wish I could right it. Maybe I can. I'm goin' to keep an eye on you. I know why you want this money. You're goin' to get married. Don't do it unless you can live straight. Set up a house on a scale within your means, an' don't never carry a guilty conscience into it. You're workin' for a good man. Live on what you earn an' quit dreamin' of easy money."

"Yes, sir," said the Swede. "You talk very good. When I get married, I go straight. Yes, oh, yes! You bat!"

He took the money, and a youth in the neat livery of the association entered noiselessly and showed him out.

Bill called up the Plaza, but Mrs. Clarendon was not there. She had retained her apartments, but it was thought that she had gone out of town for a few days.

Burgoyne, Di Senti, Miss Holden, and now Mrs. Clarendon—all missing. The pearls still to seek. It was Friday morning, and the truce with Saintsbury expired in a little more than thirty hours.

CHAPTER XVII

BEYOND THE LIMIT

WHAT Jack Pinney knows, and what you think he knows, are two different things, as Mrs. Clarendon had once wisely remarked. Few of his acquaintances were aware that he knew any chemistry, but he did. His knowledge of that subject was neither broad nor deep, but it was practical.

About noon of Friday, which is pay day with the association, Pinney appeared before Bill with what may be indulgently called vouchers for about eighty dollars of expenses, most of it incurred in the vain pursuit of Holy Burgoyne. Bill affixed his O. K., and said precisely what Pinney had counted on:

"Mary's drawin' the checks. Get her to make out one for that. It's late, Jack, but I suppose you want the money."

"Thanks, old boy. I do."

In Pinney's pocket was a stylographic pen precisely like the very ordinary one used by Miss Leonard. The ink which it contained had been treated with chemicals, but it would look the same on paper—for a little while.

He went into Miss Leonard's room, and amused her with a few samples of his sprightly conversation. She had always found it easy, and always safe, to laugh at Mr. Pinney's jokes. He was a bad man,

and she didn't trust him, except in that one matter of their personal relations. There, in the whole course of the acquaintance, he had seemed to deserve the confidence she could not give. He had never once offended her, by act or word or glance.

If her eyes had been quicker, she might have found at that moment her first cause of complaint against him. He changed the pens, right before her face, but she didn't see him do it. With equal dexterity he changed them back again, after she had drawn the check.

Bill signed it in the ordinary course of business, and Pinney received it from his hand—not without qualms, to do the man justice.

The ink used by Miss Leonard was already fading. Half an hour later it was almost invisible; there was just enough left to assist Pinney in imitating Miss Leonard's hand, an accomplishment which he had practiced in odd moments, but had not brought to perfection. Under the present circumstances most of his work was mere tracing, only the sum payable requiring to be changed.

The signature of William Harris and the counter signature of Theophilus Badger were unaffected, of course, and the check was now good for two thousand dollars. Pinney cashed it at the bank, and the Rubicon was passed. But that afternoon, when he gave it to Nielson—absolutely for nothing, the price of the emptiest folly and failure—he could have stabbed the grinning Swede to the heart.

"This is very good," Nielson said. "Now I get

married, yes. My, but I feel fine. When do I get some more money?"

"Oh, toward the end of next week, perhaps," Pinney responded. "We must move slowly, my boy. Experience has taught me to play these games safe."

"That's a yoke, yes?" After turning it over in his mind for some moments Nielson honored it with his characteristic chuckling laugh.

Next, Pinney got in touch with the office, and was informed by Bill that a telegram from Mrs. Clarendon had been received about four o'clock.

"It's dated at Providence," Bill said. "She's on her way to Boston. Says she's found a clew, and wants a man to help her. No hint as to what it's about."

In this exigency Bill had telephoned to Mike Leonard who had caught the five o'clock express.

In veiled language Pinney said he supposed the clew related to Miss Holden; and Bill replied with similar caution that he hoped so, but he was apprehensive that Mr. Saintsbury had captured her, and the pearls. If he had them, he could certainly take action. That would be the arrest of Pinney, though Bill said only "something serious."

It would be worse than that to Pinney; it would be utterly ruinous. He preferred flight to arrest, for his position was now such that he couldn't stand investigation from any quarter. He had no funds for an escape, beyond the small sum of his legitimate savings. He would have to get another check out of Bill, and raise it to a large figure.

Nothing of consequence happened during the night. The problem of money was on Pinney's mind every moment. The morning brought no betterment of the situation, and the afternoon would bring Saintsbury, and destruction. Throughout all this time Saintsbury had kept ominously quiet, like the besieging Indian when he is most to be feared. Certainly the old lawyer had scared Pinney to the point of total desperation.

With a view to the raising of a check he called at the bank, about eleven of Saturday forenoon, and casually inquired of a teller whom he knew intimately, what the association's balance was. The obliging teller ascertained the figures.

"Seven hundred and two dollars and forty cents," he said; and Pinney nearly fell through the floor.

"What's happened to it?" he inquired smilingly.

"There's a certified check against it," the teller responded. "Thirty-two thousand dollars."

"Oh," said Pinney. "Thank you. I knew about that transaction, but I thought it wasn't coming off till next week."

So the prophecy which he had made to Gleason, in that conversation of Wednesday afternoon, was about to be fulfilled. Bill had seen the finish coming and was about to loot the treasury. Well, why not? It was what Jack himself would have done, if he could.

He assumed that Bill was taking care of Mike Leonard. Perhaps Mike's going to Boston had been a blind. It was the first flight from the cage, and by nightfall all the birds would be gone. Nobody

was in the association's offices, when Pinney returned, except the humblest subordinates.

Mary Leonard was not in, but Pussyfoot said that she was coming back soon. Possibly; but she might already be in flight, following her father. Mike and Bill might be turning some really big trick; they were not small men. But if they were doing anything, it was certain that Mary didn't know it. An awful pang went through Pinney for her sake.

He knew what the association, and that honest and secure life for herself and her father and Bill Harris, had meant to her. She would be heart-broken. Pinney was aghast at the realization that it was he himself who had smashed the whole fabric of the world for this pretty, bright-faced girl with the old-fashioned, amiable ways. He must always keep track of her, in case she should need help. Thus for half a minute he sincerely thought of himself as Mary's guardian angel, and his blistered conscience was salved.

Gleason had gone on an errand of his own, leaving a note for Bill. Pinney opened it with his usual fineness of touch, though he doubted that Bill would ever see it. The note ran:

> DEAR BILL: I've just learned that Holy has a bungalow on Long Island. He took it only a few weeks ago. I'm going down there on a chance, and will report as soon as possible. Keep a stiff upper lip, old boy. The game's not lost yet. FRANK.

Whether this was a fiction, and meant that the writer was afraid to face Saintsbury this afternoon, Pinney was uncertain. It looked as if Frank would view the crash from a safe distance, ready to run if the disaster should be too violent. On the other hand, he *might* have found means to lift something really worth while; he might already be in flight to parts unknown, having left this note as a bogus clew to his whereabouts. There had been a hint of mystery in his behavior, these last few days, ever since that memorable conversation wherein Jack had lent his brains to his less gifted associate. If Frank had secretly raised a stake, and was now prepared to flee with it, alone, that would be an awful treason to friendship.

Pinney now had the offices all to himself, except for the young attendant called Pussyfoot. Twelve o'clock was the closing hour on Saturdays in summer.

"Mr. Harris asked you to stay, I suppose," Pinney said. "What are your orders, if any one should call?"

"Everybody's gone for the day, sir; unless it's Mr. Saintsbury inquiring. If it is, I tell him that Mr. Harris will be here a little before five."

"Suppose he asks other questions?"

"I don't know anything at all, sir. That's my orders."

That is the way Bill would play it, of course, whether he was ever coming back or not. He would leave instructions that would stall off Saintsbury as

long as possible and would keep everybody else away from the place.

Pinney went out, hailed a cab, and rode to his rooms. He half expected to find Gleason packing, but he was not there, and none of his things were gone. Pinney packed a small bag of his own, checked it at a neighboring hotel, and then walked toward Fifth Avenue and to the bank where Dan O'Halloran was night watchman. In a few hours it would be the most favorable time of the week to rob a bank. Who would go in with him?

As he halted on the curb, thinking of this question, he was aware of some one coming down the Avenue. It was Holy Burgoyne.

He showed the effects of his recent experience, but not so plainly as might have been expected. The notable thing about him was the increased determination in his countenance. Pinney remarked this at the first glance; the second showed him something far more worthy of attention, though eyes like his were required to see it at all.

Holy was carrying the Burgoyne pearls in a money belt. Pinney knew he had them just as well as if they had been draped around his neck and hanging on the outside of his blue serge coat. A moment later the glances of the two men met, and Pinney's glance never strayed lower than Burgoyne's tie in the course of the ensuing conversation.

"Hello, Jack," said Burgoyne. "How goes the battle? Did you get my note?"

"Yes; thank you," Pinney replied. "It was very reassuring. How is our friend?"

"Referring to whom, my dear boy?"

"Count di Senti."

"How is he? I'm sure I don't know. I haven't seen him since Wednesday. Why do you ask?"

"There's a well-defined rumor that he's rather badly hurt," said Pinney.

"He may be dead for all I know," Burgoyne replied. "I've been on a kind of a spree, Mr. Pinney, to tell you the truth, and then I've been sobering up. I've lost track of the world. How is Bill Harris?"

"Fine and fit," Pinney replied. "Would you like to see him? Come along down to the association's rooms; he'll be there, I guess. I'll send out for a pitcher of mint julep."

"Never again!" said Holy. "I have the finest thirst this minute that ever I had in my life, but no alcohol now. I'd like to drink a gallon of iced tea though. Will you come upstairs? I've got a few things to do, and then we'll go to the association. Or I'll meet you there by and by, if you'd prefer."

"In about half an hour?"

"Yes, that'll do," said Burgoyne, and, acknowledging Pinney's gesture of farewell, he unlocked the door and vanished into the hall.

He had not wished Pinney to go in with him, of course. There was reason to suppose that he was bringing the pearls home for the purpose of hiding them in his room, though that was precisely what Jack himself would never do. Where the pearls were at that moment, there was the proper place for them, in Pinney's judgment, though he

would have known how to wear a money belt so that it couldn't be detected.

There had been every indication that Burgoyne was sincere in making the appointment at the association, and in his expressed desire to see Bill Harris. It was a million to one that he would not find Bill there. Pinney felt reasonably secure against any interruption of the forthcoming scene between himself and Burgoyne in the association's rooms.

Into his mind there had come the conception of a deed wholly different from any that he had ever committed or seriously contemplated. Few men could have shrunk back from it with a more sensitive abhorrence, but on the other hand few would have been capable of a tenth part of the temptation that grappled Pinney like the two hands of the devil. His soul was dragged to this crime as a coward to execution; it fought and wept and babbled, but the sheriffs of perdition were inexorable.

As soon as Burgoyne was out of sight, Pinney looked about and saw a taxicab without a fare. He beckoned to the chauffeur, who drew up at the curb.

"Wait here twenty minutes," said Pinney, giving the man a dollar, "but if a friend of mine comes out of that door, and wants to engage you, don't wait for me."

"Very good, sir," said the man.

Pinney hurried away, and bought three substances, each at a different drug store. One was a fluid, and the other two were solids. He returned to the bank building in a cab, and finding the one that he had posted still on the station, he halted his own vehicle

below the cross street, and kept watch through the rear window. In a few minutes Burgoyne was seen to enter the waiting cab, and the two went down the Avenue in procession, Pinney ordering more speed and drawing away from the other as he became sure of its destination.

In the offices of the association there was no one but Pussyfoot.

"Mr. Burgoyne will be here presently," Pinney said. "Please show him into my office."

There was very scant time to mix the chemicals that he had bought, much less than he would have liked, for he was compelled to make a calculation to arrive at the proper dosage. Mingled in a vial, the three substances became a liquid, with a faint brownish color and a bitter taste. He touched it with his tongue; the flavor was more powerful than he had expected, and he was on the point of reviewing his calculations, made on the back of an envelope, when he heard Burgoyne approaching. Vial and envelope instantly disappeared, and Pinney was preparing to make tea when the door opened.

"Ah, come in, General Burgoyne," said he heartily, and, in the privacy of his mind, he added: "The pearls are still with you, I perceive."

Burgoyne stared at the tea things with a fierce appetite glaring from his eyes.

"I beg pardon," said he. "Is there any ice?"

"Pussyfoot," said Pinney, "a large dish of broken ice, my boy, and a few lemons."

These were brought, and the tea was prepared.

"Do you happen to know where Mrs. Clarendon and my cousin have gone?" Burgoyne inquired.

"To Boston, I believe," Pinney replied, and nothing more was said on any phase of the mystery.

Pinney put the ice into the glasses, and secretly poured the contents of the little vial into Burgoyne's. The stuff didn't even give a man a headache, but it did require care in the dosage.

Suddenly the door opened, and Gleason entered. The shock to Pinney was violent, but Gleason at the same time was receiving the surprise of seeing Burgoyne.

"Iced tea?" said Gleason. "Great! Get a glass for yourself, Jack, like a good fellow. I'll take yours."

The conversation which ensued between him and Burgoyne was no more illuminating than that which had been held with Pinney on the Avenue, and it was even more brief.

Burgoyne drank tea as if he had spent the time since Wednesday night in that region from which cold fluids are eternally excluded. There was no chance that any of the sleeping powder would fail to be washed off the ice in his glass, and Pinney, watching him with an agony of anticipation, strove to remember the figures of the calculation on the envelope.

"I'll take just a wee drop more, old boy," said Burgoyne, holding out his glass, and the next instant he slid softly from the chair to the floor, striking on his shoulder and turning over on his face.

CHAPTER XVIII

FOILED AGAIN

"WHAT the devil is this?" Gleason demanded.
"Harmless, absolutely harmless," said Pinney. "Help me put him on the couch. He's got the pearls in a belt."

Gleason stooped beside the unconscious body.

"This man is far gone, Jack," he said, and, without assistance, he lifted Burgoyne easily and carried him to the couch.

"Get the pearls, Frank," said Pinney, his voice quivering with the stress of desperation.

Gleason opened Burgoyne's coat and shirt. Suddenly he withdrew his hand and half rose, with a quick, backward glance at Jack.

"Good Lord! He's wounded in the side. He's bleeding, Jack. This is no money belt; it's a doctor's bandage, with strips of cloth tied round. There are no pearls on this man."

Pinney stood stricken beyond words or motion. He leaned against the wall at the foot of the couch. Even with this support he couldn't stand; his knees bent under him. He fought against the weakness, staggered to the side of the couch, and knelt down as if to see for himself what Gleason had described. But he saw nothing. He knelt there with his eyes shut, while the floor tilted like the deck of a ship

before the final plunge. The luck was too much for him. Three days ago he had risked his liberty, his standing in the world, the new life which he valued more than he would admit even in his own thoughts —he had risked, he had lost, all these in stealing a few pounds of worthless iron. Now he had forfeited both body and soul to rob a man of absolutely nothing.

"Jack, what did you put into that tea?" Gleason demanded.

Pinney looked up, clutching his pale lips with shaking fingers.

"It isn't *what* I put into it; it's how much. Frank, I'm pretty well rattled. Look through these figures. How many grains would there be in two teaspoonfuls?"

Gleason studied the calculation.

"This is all off," he said."You've made a wrong addition here. This is forty-eight grains, not twenty-eight. There's twelve grains to a teaspoonful."

"There ought to be only seven," said Pinney, with a groan. "It's a bad overdose."

Gleason touched him softly on the arm and turned him round.

"Fatal?" he asked.

"I don't know," said Pinney. "You've got me all tangled up. It seems to me I ought to have given him only seven grains in all, and he's had twenty-four."

"He hasn't had any at all," Gleason replied. "I changed the glasses."

"What?" Pinney yelled. "You gave it to *me?*"

"No; I took it myself. You'll notice that I didn't drink much."

Pinney cast a wild glance toward the table, and saw Gleason's glass still two thirds full.

"Frank," he said, "you've saved me from a murder."

Gleason, in his turn, looked at the glass.

"Well," said he, "I hope so. I hit it very light, but I didn't count on a dose for an elephant. After what I'd said I couldn't blow the game by passing it up altogether. But I made sure you shouldn't do this thing, Jack, because it's over the limit."

Pinney shuddered to his heels.

"Go to the switchboard, and give me a wire," he said, taking the telephone. "Quick. I'll call a doctor."

Gleason turned toward the door just as the latch clicked. It opened slowly an inch or two, and the voice of the young attendant spoke from beyond:

"Mrs. Clarendon and Miss Holden are here."

Something in the clear, untroubled note of it smote Pinney to his quivering inwards with the shock of contrast. He started up, forgetting for the moment that Burgoyne's condition was no fault of his.

"I don't want to see them. Keep them out; hold them till I've had a chance at the phone. I'll go into Bill's room when I hear you coming."

"Keep cool, Jack," Gleason said. "You've done no harm. I can carry this dope all right. Don't worry."

The door closed behind him with no unusual force,

but Burgoyne seemed to wake at the sound. He raised his head, stared defiance at the empty air while getting his wits, then turned his glance to Pinney in a normal manner.

"Sorry to have broken up your pleasant party," said he. "What keeled me over?"

"You fainted," Pinney replied. "I'm calling a doctor."

Burgoyne breathed deeply two or three times while gathering his strength. He sat erect on the couch, and made a brief and contemptuous survey of the region of his injury, on the left side at the level of his belt.

"It's merely superficial," he said, buttoning his shirt and coat. "Didn't spear a single giblet. I strained it a little this afternoon, dressing in a hurry, but it's stopped bleeding now. Don't call anybody on my account. I ran away from my own doctor, and I'll go back to him as soon as I've seen Bill Harris."

"Bill may not come in," said Pinney.

"Not come in? Why, of course he will. He'll have to meet Saintsbury. There'll be a hot time, Brother Pinney, and I want to help you fellows all I can. I hope you don't deceive yourself in this matter. Saintsbury believes you got the pearls, and he'll go the limit."

"I cherish no delusions," Pinney responded. "We haven't found the pearls, and the whole game is up unless you can tell us where they are. We can prove that Di Senti planned to get them, but not that he succeeded. You can make or break us on that

point; it all rests with you. Did Di Senti turn the trick in his office when you and he were there together?"

"I meant to lay my evidence before Harris alone," said Burgoyne, after momentary reflection; "but you're the man that's in the nozzle of the gun, and you have a right to an answer. Yes, I believe Di Senti stole the pearls. He must have had a dummy box prepared, and hidden in his desk. He changed them while I was at the telephone. I had no suspicion at the time, but it came to me afterward. For certain reasons I couldn't accuse the man without giving him a chance. I tried to do it and failed."

"You failed to get the pearls?"

"I made a complete mess of everything, including my own carcass," Burgoyne replied. "What has become of Di Senti?"

"We don't know," said Pinney. "We thought you were taking care of him."

"He didn't require any care, as far as I know," said Burgoyne. "He got away in good condition. Disappeared, eh? Well, that was to be expected. Is there no clew to him?"

Before Pinney could respond the door was flung open, and Anna flashed into the room. Her speed carried her halfway to the couch, which was diagonally opposite the door, but she stopped short at sight of Cousin Holy rising in her presence with his usual alacrity.

"Hello, little cousin," said Burgoyne. "Did somebody frighten you? What did he say?"

"I don't know." said Anna. "I didn't wait to hear. Oh, Cousin Holy, are you much hurt?"

She went to him. She seemed not to have seen Pinney at all. He had stepped aside toward Bill's room, into which he passed unobserved.

"I've known it from the first," he said to himself. "She's in love with him. Di Senti was a childish dream."

With that he fell to thinking of Di Senti and the pearls. The man had almost three days' start; he was many miles away. It was not so much the hopeless nature of the pursuit as the loss of appetite for the Burgoyne pearls. Pinney's hand was in his pocket, clasping the vial which held what was left of the drug. It poisoned him, merely at the touch. He was aware of physical sickness.

What he really wanted was to wipe out the last few days and be back again in the old job, quiet and safe. His former idea that Bill had skipped now seemed to him absurd. It was far more probable that Bill had discovered the stealing of the two thousand dollars and had put a certified check against the balance in the bank to protect it from any further attempts.

There was evidence enough against Di Senti to hold Saintsbury off and save the association. The Swede could be frightened into silence. Bill could be placated in the matter of the raised check, either by a fiction of some sort or by a straight confession, which would probably be the better way. Good old Bill would never turn against a pal. A nice kind of pal Pinney had been, as he owned to himself, but

Bill had a heart; he believed in giving every man another chance. This time there'd be no more monkey business. "I've had my lesson." thought Pinney.

It came into his mind that he would go to Bill's apartments and see whether there was any sign of flight. He went out by the corridor door, and walked toward the elevator.

"Hello, Jack," said a man who was loitering in the hall. "Where you going?"

The man was Con Devere, a detective from Headquarters.

"Uptown," said Pinney. "What are you doing here?"

"Well," responded Devere, with embarrassment, "I was waiting for you. There's something doing, Jack, and I don't know what it is. I've got orders not to let you go out."

Pinney laughed.

"What is it, Con, if I do go?" said he. "Is it a collar?"

"It's an invitation to Headquarters," Devere replied; "but I suppose the idea is that you'll stay where you are. That would be much more agreeable to me, Jack."

"You bet I'll stay," said Pinney. "I wasn't really going anywhere. I know all about this foolishness, my boy, and I want to see the fun. We're planning to throw somebody pretty hard, Con, and you'll hear him drop, if you wait. It won't be long; you can get home to dinner."

"Laying for somebody, are you?" said the detec-

tive. "Well, that's about the way I doped it out. You boys are too cagy to get in wrong. What kind of graft could you be looking for that's better than the snap you've got?"

"Search me," said Pinney. "I'm satisfied. Have a cigar, Con?"

Devere accepted this courtesy, and Pinney went into the offices by the public entrance.

"Mr. Harris just telephoned," said Pussyfoot. "He asked for Miss Leonard."

"Did Mr. Gleason speak with him?"

"No, sir. Mr. Harris said he wouldn't take the time. He asked me to tell you and Mr. Gleason that the goods are located. He'll be down very soon."

"Thank you," said Pinney, and passed through the main office into Bill's room again.

He knew that it was Saintsbury who had caused the sentry to be posted in the hall. Probably there had not yet been any definite complaint made at Headquarters. Saintsbury would not have mentioned the pearls until he was absolutely compelled to do so. His influence was doubtless strong enough to secure a favor from the police department on easy terms. No arrest would be made until Saintsbury and Bill had met and fought their battle.

Pinney sat down in Bill's chair and tried to estimate the chance that the pearls had really been found. It was possible that Mike Leonard had caught Di Senti in Boston and had recovered the loot. Perhaps he had come back on the same train as Mrs. Clarendon.

The sound of a key in a lock, the opening and

closing of a door, caused Pinney to rise and look into Mary Leonard's room. Mary had just come in from the corridor, at whose end the room was situated. Under the girl's arm, very closely held, was a box done up in brown paper. It was of the same size and shape as another box which Mr. Pinney did not hope to be able to forget either in this world or the next.

Mary was excited. Her response to Pinney's greeting had that peculiar tone, dry and breathless, which reveals a tension of the nerves. She seemed embarrassed by Pinney's presence. She stood clutching the box as if she didn't know what to do with it. Finally she unlocked a desk, rolled up the top, and then rolled it down again, veiling the box from view.

"Mr. Harris just tried to get you by telephone," said Pinney. "Pussyfoot can tell you what he said."

The bell button, whereby the boy could be summoned, was under the edge of Bill's desk. Pinney stepped aside to let Mary pass before him to the other room. She wore a white flannel coat, with pockets, into one of which she dropped her key ring. Pinney followed her across the threshold, and the keys were in his pocket, not hers. He closed the door between the rooms.

"Pussyfoot's alone outside," he said, "and I'm going away for a few minutes." He moved toward the corridor exit. "Perhaps you'd better talk with Pussyfoot by the other door, where you can have an eye on the main office."

The boy would tell Mary about the guests and

about Burgoyne's illness. Pinney counted on having plenty of time.

Pure instinct was in control of him. It might fairly be said that so far as his reason was concerned he didn't wish to get the pearls; certainly not in this way. But he went right on after them without hesitation.

From the corridor he passed into Mary's room. He listened at the other door; she was talking with Pussyfoot. Unless she should miss her keys, which was highly improbable, there would be ten minutes at Pinney's disposal. From beside the desk he could hear faintly the sound of the voices. While that should continue, it would be safe for him to remain.

He opened the desk, and removed the brown paper from the box. Underneath was a white wrapper absolutely similar to the one which he so well remembered. It was tied with the same sort of cord, hastily sealed across the knot with a mass of wax. Pinney detached it with a knife blade.

His teeth were clenched. The breath whistled in his nostrils. He opened the box, and saw a white mass—the wrapping of the pearls! For the fraction of a second he felt like Jack Pinney again. The appetite for life returned to him, the vivid interest in himself and his adventures as he thrust his hands into the wrappings of tissue paper and cotton.

He came upon a quantity of medium-sized nails, several pounds of them, very neatly packed so that they wouldn't jingle.

Pinney bent forward, his fingers clenched, his elbows supporting him on the desk. If a handful of

those nails had been driven into the back of his neck and head, the sensation might have been similar to that which he endured. A kind of paralysis spread down his spine; he tried in vain to control his hands, which should have served him speedily to cover up the evidence of what he had done.

"What's come to me?" he whispered. "This is a poor show I'm making."

He straightened himself, and with a ghastly imitation of calmness proceeded to restore the box to its former state, heating the rude seal with a match and pressing it down upon the knotted string. When all was done, he closed the desk and laid the keys on the leaf. Mary would suppose that she had left them there. He shrugged his shoulders, laughed silently, and staggered to the corridor door, where for some moments he clung to the knob with his head against the panel. Then, steadily enough, he opened the door and went out.

CHAPTER XIX

THE REAL THIEF

DEVERE was on guard in the hall. Pinney threw him a bit of banter and passed into the association's suite by the public entrance. Mary Leonard was just ending her talk with Pussyfoot, and she seemed to feel that she had been detained too long.

Pinney overtook her at the door of Bill's room, and walked across with her. He was asking where she had been all day, and she was answering that Mr. Harris had let her do a number of things for him outside. He had telephoned in, and all the men were gone. As usual she spoke of this extra work as if it were a valued favor which she had received from her kindest friend.

She didn't miss her keys till Pinney was opening the door for her. Next instant she saw them, and her mind was relieved; but she lost no time in raising the top of the desk. This was the sequence of events on which Pinney had counted. It gave him the chance to pretend that he was noticing the box for the first time, and to ask with a clever change of voice:

"What's that, Mary?"

"I think it's the pearls," she said, quivering with

excitement. "I wish Mr. Harris would come. I don't know where he is."

"You *think* it's the pearls," Pinney said gently. "Haven't you looked to see?"

"It's sealed on the inside. I didn't like to meddle with it. Mr. Rhinehart advised me not to."

"You got it at Seitz's?"

"Yes. I talked with Mr. Harris—reporting to him on another matter—and he asked me to go to Seitz's and get this. He said it was in a filing cabinet in Count di Senti's room. Mr. Harris had just been talking with father by long distance."

"I see," Pinney said. "Di Senti has confessed. He stole the pearls and hid them in the store. He couldn't get them out, Wednesday afternoon. That evening he did something which made him afraid to go to the store next day. He fled in the night."

"What did he do?"

"He stabbed Mr. Burgoyne; not seriously, but he thought he'd killed him. Don't be alarmed, Mary; Mr. Burgoyne is in my room this minute, and he's all right. Lucky to be alive."

He surely was; for reasons unknown to him; reasons hidden in a vial in Jack Pinney's pocket.

Mary didn't even ask how the assault had taken place. She felt kindly toward Mr. Burgoyne, but if he hadn't been much hurt she could wait for the details. She touched the package.

"Ought we to open this?"

"No. If the pearls are there, all's well. If they're not, we can't do anything till Mr. Harris comes."

"But he's counting on them." Mary was pale to the lips. "He said he had Mr. Saintsbury beaten."

"He has. If your father said the pearls were in that box, they are."

"But it's been there all this time. Mr. Rhinehart may have found it."

"Piggy wouldn't dare do any tricks." he assured her. "We know too much about him, Mary."

This sounded well; and in fact Pinney did not believe that Rhinehart would dare to *steal* the pearls. Beyond doubt he had taken them. But almost certainly he had preferred to play safe, and had turned over the pearls to Saintsbury for the best price he could extort.

This meant that the association was beaten and destroyed. Pinney knew that Nielson would be scared, cajoled and bribed into telling his story to Saintsbury. Perhaps he had done it already. With that testimony and the pearls the old scorpion of the law would sting the association to death.

Of course there was one chance in a million that the goods were still in Rhinehart's possession and could be got away from him. Aside from that, there was nothing for poor Jack but instant flight. He must warn Gleason; show him the single slender hope, and ask him if he would join in a play against Rhinehart.

Pinney went toward his own room and met Mrs. Clarendon coming out. Unable to dodge her, and compelled to speak, he asked how Holy was.

"He seems very much as usual," she said; "perfectly unmanageable. He declines to go home or to

have a doctor, or to do anything except sit on your couch with Anna and hold her hand."

"I doubt he'll ever let go," Pinney responded. "And it will be a happier ending than the story might have had."

Mrs. Clarendon shuddered.

"Di Senti was running away with Teresa Campanari," she said. "Did you know that? I saw her on the Boston train; the count had gone on ahead. They were to sail together for some out-of-the-way place, I suppose. I telegraphed Bill for help, and he sent Mr. Leonard; and I met him and told him where to go. I had followed the Campanari from the station to a quiet little hotel. Mr. Leonard found them both there and arrested them in the least conspicuous manner—so he told me by telephone. I didn't see him again. I made sure that Anna wasn't in Cambridge, and then took an early train this morning."

"Your name shall be written in letters of gold on these walls," Pinney said. "You have saved the association."

But he knew that it was lost, and that his own liberty was forfeit. Life in a prison would not offer anything very much like this last conversation, on terms of intimate acquaintance, with beautiful Julia Clarendon, the picture of elegance and the soul of fascination. What had *he* done with those opportunities that he had preached of to Gleason?

Pussyfoot appeared, evidently to announce a visitor; and without giving him time to speak Pinney excused himself to the lady and went into the outer

office, leaving her in Bill's room and to the courtesies of Mary Leonard. He feared it might be Saintsbury calling ahead of his appointed hour. It was worse than that; the visitor was Nielson.

Pinney walked rapidly to the gate where the Swede waited, pale and tremulous, with the look of a man who is faint from running. His sweaty countenance wore a forced and eager grin, such as a child puts on when he promises to be good but expects a whipping all the same.

"What are you doing here?" Pinney demanded, across the gate. "Get out as quick as you can. I'll meet you somewhere."

"You come, too," Nielson said, choking with excitement. "Don't wait here. I tell you why outside."

It was impossible for Pinney to go, even if he had wished to do so; but neither could he stand in so exposed a place, arguing with this obstinate animal. He opened the gate, and as Nielson made no move to enter, he took him by the arm and led him into the small reception room. No good could come of reproaches. To gain the man's confidence was the thing desirable, and Jack spoke quietly:

"What's the trouble, Nielson?"

The Swede gasped like a stranded fish.

"I ban down by Mr. Saintsbury's," he said.

"You were a fool to go," said Pinney. "What did he get out of you?"

Nielson wiped his forehead with his sleeve. A cheap leather satchel which he carried struck against his face, unnoticed.

"I guess all," he said. "Yes, sir; I told him."

This was rough treatment for raw nerves. Pinney made a swift movement of the hand, swiftly checked. Nielson did not know how narrowly he had escaped being floored.

"You accused me," said Pinney. "Did you sign anything?"

"Yes, sir; but yust wait till I tell——"

"Why did you do it?"

"To get some money," Nielson gasped.

"What for? I gave you two thousand dollars, and you got five hundred from Mr. Harris. What have you done with it?"

"I ban robbed."

Pinney got the man's eye, and saw that he was telling the truth.

"By whom?"

"Yes, sir," said Nielson, incoherent with conflicting emotions. "She done me pretty good. But I don't give up yet. I think she do all right now, if I get her out."

"Out?" said Pinney, with contempt. "Isn't this the girl you were going to marry? Did you have her arrested?"

Nielson was aghast at the suggestion.

"Me?" he cried. "I bat not. No, sir. I don't know who did it."

He went on to say that Miss Engstrom had been taken from the pier of the Swedish line to police headquarters. Why it was done he had no idea. As for his money, he hadn't told anybody about that.

"I get it back when I get *her*," said he. "We don't be married yet, but I fix that all right. What trouble she's in now I help her out, and you bat she marry me in time."

"In time for what?"

"For the ship," said Nielson. "Six o'clock it goes. Yust you help me——"

"From motives of gratitude?" Pinney's voice was as smooth as a knife blade. "You yellow dog, you've sold me out to Saintsbury."

"I make it all square," Nielson rejoined. "Yes, sir; I found out what I want. Kom with me, all the three of us, me and Minna and you. We go together. Then I know what to do because you tell me."

"Go where?" said Pinney, studying the Swede's face.

"South America. Better go far away. I got a cousin in Buenos Aires; he's dead since a month or two. He wrote me what a fine place down there. Plenty rich people. We sell——"

Pinney reached out with a swiftness that no eye could follow and caught Nielson by the throat.

"You square-headed Scandinavian monkey," he said softly. "You've got the pearls yourself."

"Yes, sir." Nielson was half strangled, but he made no effort to defend his windpipe. "I got 'em all this long time, since Wednesday."

Pinney relaxed his clutch.

"Where?" said he.

Nielson lifted the satchel a few inches. His

scared eyes shrank from it, as if it had been full of dynamite.

Any doubt which lingered in Pinney's mind was dispelled by that look. It was not the first time that he had seen a thief haunted by terror of his booty. Nielson had neither knowledge to conceive nor skill to execute that counterfeit, nor could he have feigned the agony in those words of his, "all this long time."

"My son," said Pinney, "this is the smart thing. It's what you should have done in the first place."

"Why would I let you in?" Nielson retorted. "You don't act fair. You say you got 'em yourself, when I go to you. I try to find out how you sell 'em, if you *did* have 'em. No good. I give up. I took you for my partner now, all straight."

"Does the girl know?" said Pinney.

"No, *sir*. She does *not*. If I tell her yet, she have me by a good hold."

"Then let her stay where she is. You've found out what sort of a girl she is——"

Nielson's mouth and eyes opened.

"But she's all I do it for," he said. "I want to make her rich. She likes it. Me, I don't care much. You bat I never do this for myself. I ban in hell, yes, all since Wednesday. Sleep? I don't know what he is!"

"Give me that bag!" said Pinney.

Nielson hesitated, and then gave up the satchel, but he held Pinney by the arm with the clutch of a drowning man. The satchel would not open; it was not only locked in the ordinary way, but there were

two screws driven through the jaws of it and clinched—a very neat job not readily perceptible. Nielson explained that he had done it when he made up his mind to sell his evidence to Saintsbury. He had tried to find Pinney first, but had failed.

For a moment Jack was tempted to slash the side of the satchel with a knife, but he decided not to spoil it. As a carrier it would be useful.

Two things now remained to be done: to escape from the office and to accomplish the final separation of the Swede from the pearls. Remorseful thoughts of Gleason ran through Pinney's mind, and there was Bill besides, up against it, poor fellow—in a few minutes Saintsbury would be on top of him with Nielson's affidavit. That would wind up the association. Well, the boys could be taken care of by and by. Pinney saw himself behaving generously in some golden day of the indefinite future, but now he would waste not one second in making his get-away.

It was now impossible for Pinney to escape except by the use of disguise. The materials were at hand, in the room known as the museum where relics of famous crimes, the fruit of Woodbury Newcomb's travels and researches, were displayed for the edification of visitors. If time sufficed Jack did not doubt that he could achieve a make-up that would take him past Devere. But it wouldn't do to hold Nielson in the offices; he must be sent out ahead.

"I'll meet you in a few minutes," Pinney said. "Have a taxicab ready on the Twenty-fourth Street side."

"You'll come along quick," said Nielson, putting out a hand for the satchel.

To give up the pearls rasped Pinney's vitals with a file, but there was no alternative. Nielson would never go away without them. There might be advantages in letting him carry them out of the building. To get them away from him afterward would be no difficult feat.

As he released his hold upon the satchel there came to him suddenly the fear that Devere might have orders as to Nielson also. It seemed unlikely, but the bare possibility made Pinney's heart feel as if some one had kicked it. He glanced sidelong at Nielson, who walked as if he were falling asleep, and wore the pallor of a man going to the gallows. Pinney fancied that he himself might be looking very similar, and he made a strong call upon his nerve as he led Nielson to the outer door.

Devere was pacing the corridor, fanning himself with his hat. He nodded and winked to Pinney, but showed no interest in Nielson, who passed unmolested to the elevators. A car leaped up in the shaft and stopped. The clanking doors opened. Saintsbury stepped out, squarely in Nielson's path.

"Aha!" said the lawyer. "On time, eh? I rather thought you would be." He took Nielson by the arm.

The Swede uttered a hollow groan, and rolled beseeching eyes toward Pinney, but there was no help in that quarter. If it had been a question of dealing with Saintsbury alone, flight by way of the stairs might have offered the ghost of a hope, but with

Devere on call escape was out of the question. Pinney made a beckoning gesture which Nielson rightly interpreted and allowed himself to be led in unresisting.

When the lawyer and his captive came to the gate, Pinney had already passed through. He was addressing the attendant, giving some instructions to which he appended a sentence in Swedish, not for the ears of Pussyfoot, who had no acquaintance with that language.

"Give your bag to the boy as you come in," was the meaning of the Swedish words.

The sound of his native tongue, utterly unexpected, startled Nielson into obedience. He relinquished the bag as he entered by the gate which Pussyfoot held open. If Saintsbury saw the transfer, he made no sign of interest. He was occupied with Pinney, whom he recognized, though he had never before seen him at close range.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Saintsbury," said Jack, with a perfect manner, grave, dignified, and courteous. "Will you be seated for a moment while Mr. Harris is informed that you have come?" He ushered him toward the reception room.

Saintsbury regarded him sidelong, with a contempt obviously forced, but mellowed by jocularity.

"Well, Pinney," he said. "I flatter myself that I have got you."

But he hadn't. Wheeling about, when he had crossed the threshold, he discovered that he had only the pale, despairing Swede for audience. He looked out at the door. There was no one in sight but the

uniformed attendant on his way, presumably, to the lair of Harris.

Pinney had not known that Bill was in his lair, but in fact he had arrived and was entertaining Mrs. Clarendon, while Mary Leonard watched from her own room with mortal impatience. She had received a sign from Bill which meant, "Did you get it?" She had signaled, "Yes." To which Bill had silently replied, "All right." Bill seemed untroubled by anxiety or haste, though the fatal hour of five was drawing near.

"Bill, have you got the pearls?" asked Mrs. Clarendon.

"Yes," he said. "I guess so. That's confidential, if you'll be good enough to so consider it."

"Oh, Bill, I'm so glad!" She gave him her hand. "I congratulate you with all my heart. You won't give the pearls to Mr. Saintsbury, Bill?"

"No."

"There'll be a lovely row. Not too private, I trust," she added anxiously. "You'll need my moral support surely, my very dear friend."

He gave her a full glance, and the most amiable smile that can be sculptured in iron. She took it to be a ticket of admission, and expressed her thanks.

"Maybe Miss Holden better not be present," he said, his usual gravity descending upon him. "The case'll have to be gone into. Including Di Senti. Perhaps I might speak to Miss Holden, privately, before Mr. Saintsbury comes."

"I can tell you all she knows," the lady assured

him; and she told first what had happened to Holy. "Anna didn't do anything, Wednesday evening," she went on. "After losing track of Di Senti she rode aimlessly about, doubtless meditating very desperate and youthful performances. But she didn't go to that man's rooms; didn't really believe he was there. She merely worked herself up into a dumb frenzy and then came home to me as you saw her."

"It's well she had so good a friend to go to," Bill said, perceiving that Mrs. Clarendon was secretly dissatisfied with her own part in the affair. "Why didn't she stay?"

"She tells me she wanted to be alone, and fight it out with herself. I think she really meant to go to Cambridge, but at the last moment changed her mind, happening to think of Cousin Holy's bungalow and the possibility that he was there. In the same circumstances I should have run to any other man in the world. But they're an odd pair, perfectly alike, and adjusted to those intimate comprehensions which Anna will soon be old enough to appreciate."

"Mr. Gleason found Anna in the bungalow," Mrs. Clarendon continued, "chaperoned by the old mammy who does Holy's cooking. He brought Anna back to town, and she went to the Grand Central to meet me. Now, Bill, does she get the pearls? And how does she keep them?"

"That's up to her," said he. "But we'll help her all we can. Anyhow, she gets 'em."

"Will Mr. Saintsbury have to pay the tax?"

"He will."

"He'd rather die."

"That's up to him," Bill said.

Pussyfoot came to announce the arrival of Mr. Saintsbury. Bill merely made a sign that the visitor would have to wait a bit. Pussyfoot already had the lines for that act; Mr. Newcomb had taught them to him long ago.

CHAPTER XX

THE END OF THE TRUCE

AFTER deserting Saintsbury in the reception room Pinney, with the silent swiftness of a leopard, had taken the satchel from Pussyfoot and had vanished into the museum, closing the door behind him. Materials for disguise were in two large cabinets, and between them was an antique dressing table fitted into a corner. A curtain could be drawn across from one cabinet to the other, making a sort of dressing room for use when Pinney and Mike Leonard entertained guests of the association with clever protean tricks.

Hastily selecting what he required, Jack drew the curtain and sat down before the mirror. He pulled on a blond wig, and began to build up a yellow mustache and beard of a peculiar design, made in fourteen separate pieces which could be gummed to the face in such a way as to produce a very natural effect. About half of this was on when he heard some one enter the room. Peering through the curtains, he saw Gleason, who seemed about to go away, and then came slowly across to the curtained corner.

A partnership was now inevitable, and Jack was not altogether sorry. He might stand greatly in need of assistance in getting away. It might even be safer to let Frank carry the pearls. Without waiting to be

discovered, Pinney put out his head from behind the curtain.

"Holy Jerusalem!" murmured Gleason, staring at the preposterous countenance. "What is this?"

"Frank," said Pinney, "I've got 'em."

"Got 'em? Well, you certainly look it. I took you for a dream. That drug of yours has made me see all kinds of things, and my heart's going like a wheelbarrow with a square wheel."

"I've got the pearls, I tell you," Pinney broke in. "Nielson had them, and I did him out. They're here."

He drew aside the curtain, and showed the satchel on the dressing table.

"You're crazy," Gleason retorted, but he went hastily back to the door and fastened it with a chair under the knob. It locked only from the outside. "Now, Jack," he said, returning, "if there's anything in this pipe of yours, show me." He put out his hand for the bag.

"You can't open it," said Pinney. "The fool has screwed it together. No; don't cut it." Gleason had taken out his knife. "We'd better leave it as it is. We can use it."

Gleason hesitated. He pressed a hand over the heart whose antics he had described.

"Jack, what shall we do?" he said. "Will you take my advice? Let's leave them alone. Give them to Bill and save this old shop. I told you, before you led me into this awful mess, that I was tamed. I'm ten times more so now. Have you enjoyed the last few days? I haven't. They've given me a

willingness to live straight—on my salary and what I can knock down for expenses."

"It won't last, Frank. You're a fool to tie up to it. Here's a stake that'll fix us forever."

"I feel as if you'd fixed *me* forever," Gleason rejoined. "The Burgoyne pearls won't help me much, if I drop dead in the elevator, trying to get away with them. No, Jack; I have a curious desire to die honest, and a feeling that I'm going to do it damned soon."

There was a sound of some one at the door. Pinney dodged behind the curtain.

"Block it off, Frank. Nobody must see me."

Gleason carried his two-hundred-and-odd pounds softly and swiftly to the door, and opened it not too wide. Pussyfoot stood without.

"Mr. Harris is asking for you, sir, and for Mr. Pinney. He wants you to be there before I show in Mr. Saintsbury."

"I'm going right in, but Mr. Pinney will be delayed a few minutes. Stall a bit, with Mr. Saintsbury."

"Yes, sir."

Gleason recrossed the room.

"It's all over, Jack. You can't get away; there's too much doing in the outer office. Bill is standing right in his door."

This was not true, but it was a strong argument.

"Well, that wins," Pinney said. "I lay down. Go in, Frank; fix it up for me so that I can have time to get this stuff off my face. Bill won't be

alone. You'd better give him a sign that I'm playing the game and will show up at the proper time."

"What was Bill going to do?" Gleason asked. "What does he think?"

"I don't know what he thinks now," Pinney answered. "He *did* think that Mary got the pearls at Seitz's, this afternoon. What she really got was the dummy box that Di Senti fixed up to pass off on Burgoyne but didn't get a chance to use. If Bill has opened it, he must be seeing his finish. Let him know that I'll come through with something, but don't be too definite."

"You'll play straight, Jack?"

"Damnation! How can I help it? Now skip."

Gleason put a hand on his broad chest as if he were quieting the wild antics of his poisoned heart. Then he turned and hurried from the room.

Pinney dried his face; stood listening for a moment; then went to a window, softly raised it, and climbed out. Carrying Nielson's bag he fled along the narrow ledges of stone, high in the air, the eyebrows of the building's giant face.

Gleason found Bill seated at his desk, contemplating with solemn satisfaction the unopened package of nails set in the middle of his blotter. A number of chairs had been placed for the expected company but only Mrs. Clarendon and Burgoyne were present. The lady looked perplexed and anxious. Her eyes were on the package, and it was obvious that she was suppressing with great difficulty her impulse to ask questions and to give advice.

Knowing from long experience that it wasn't nec-

essary to wait till Bill looked up, Gleason signaled Pinney's message. The fingers of Bill's right hand merely acknowledged receipt. He seemed undisturbed.

The same could not be said of Gleason. For reasons physical and mental he felt that his end was near. In addition to his other distresses he was now cursing himself for not having brought in Nielson's bag, and thus made sure of it. He seated himself beside Mrs. Clarendon and inquired as to Miss Holden.

"Bill persuaded her not to be present," Mrs. Clarendon whispered as if in church. "Mary is with her. Where is Jack Pinney?"

"He was called to the telephone," Gleason replied at random.

With that Saintsbury ushered himself in—the only man who had ever got past Pussyfoot; and the lawyer had Nielson under his wing. The Swede's countenance was absolutely wooden. Nothing could be read in it but dumb, unreasoning obstinacy.

As for Saintsbury, he presented himself in his most formidable aspect. On the face of him he was a prosecutor with a winning case. Secure against defeat or the slightest injury to his pride he was conspicuously free from the weakness of personal irritation. He hardly thought it worth while to be rude to anybody. He accorded to Mrs. Clarendon as usual the recognition due to a person of sense; and his disdain of Burgoyne was tempered with a grin at his haggard looks, presumably due to drink. Bill was the prisoner in the dock toward whom, in theory, the prosecutor feels no animosity. He ob-

served, however, that one of the defendants was missing.

"Harris," he said, "where is Pinney?"

"He'll be here presently," Bill said. "May I invite you to be seated, sir."

Any attempt at flight on Pinney's part was just what Saintsbury would have wished; and if Harris was concealing that attempt so much the worse for Harris. Every minute of his persistence in that complicity would be reckoned against him. Therefore the lawyer refrained from further questions along that line.

"We have Mr. Burgoyne with us, I perceive," he said, "and in a state of relative sobriety. Does he remember anything of consequence as to the last few days?"

"He's been hurt," Bill said.

"Fallen down stairs perhaps."

"Stabbed."

"Stabbed?" Saintsbury turned sharply to Burgoyne. "How is this? What did you do after you left my house Wednesday evening?"

"I met Cousin Anna," said Burgoyne quietly. "She had come with Count di Senti in a cab. He rode away, and Cousin Anna followed him, thinking that he hadn't money to pay for the cab—which she had engaged—and that he might be put to inconvenience. I also followed Di Senti; lost track of him, and after a while I went to his rooms."

"I should suppose so," said the lawyer disagreeably, "if you had any sense at all."

Burgoyne ignored the interruption.

"At Di Senti's rooms I tried the door before ringing," he said. "I may have been excited, and have used more force than I intended. Anyhow I broke the door—went clear through it. I saw Di Senti in his sitting room, standing by a table, with his back to me. He looked over his shoulder, uttered a kind of yelp, grabbed from the table something which I didn't see, and took to his heels.

"I supposed he had the pearls, and I chased him—through another room and into a kitchen. He tossed what he had into an open cupboard, got a knife I don't know where, and lunged at my gizzard. I took the knife away from him, and he ran back the way he had come, with myself at his heels. I remember getting out of the kitchen, but that's all. As soon as he got clear of that room he stepped aside and hit me on the back of the head as I came through the door. What he used I can't say, but it was the right thing, perfectly satisfactory."

"Blackjack," said Bill. "It was hangin' on a hook beside the door."

"I came back to earth after a while," said Burgoyne, "and found myself lying on the floor. Di Senti was gone. I suppose he thought he had killed me. I fixed myself up as well as I could, and telephoned from Di Senti's rooms to the garage. Nielson met me, and took me to Fifty-eighth Street, a few doors west of the Plaza, where my friend, Doctor Rutledge, has taken a house. He put me to bed, after letting me write two notes, one to Mrs. Clarendon and another to Mr. Pinney. I was out of my head by that time, and I suppose the notes were

queer. Rutledge's new English butler took them out for me."

Gleason's curiosity got the better of despair, and he asked a question.

"What did the butler have in a paper bag?"

"I dimly remember," Holy said, "that Rutledge told him to get some lemons."

"Thank you." Gleason recalled the wild night when he and Pinney had scoured the town, in pursuit of a bag of lemons. But what was Jack doing now? It was time for him to come, if he was coming.

Saintsbury addressed Burgoyne:

"What Di Senti had, when you entered his rooms, was some jewels he had stolen from the store. He has run away with a singer, I am informed. They have not been traced."

"Excuse me," said Bill. "They're both under arrest in Boston. On the quiet. Our Mr. Leonard found them."

"Did your Mr. Leonard find the Burgoyne pearls in the possession of either of these persons?" Saintsbury demanded.

"No," said Bill. "The pearls were found here."

"You have them, eh? You admit it?"

"I do."

Saintsbury extended a pointing finger toward the parcel on the desk.

"What is that?"

"It's something that Di Senti left at Seitz's," Bill replied. "It was found there, this afternoon."

Saintsbury put on his coldest grin.

"Very pretty," he said. "You have got the pearls from Pinney and have planned to put the theft on Di Senti who is now discredited, so that his denial will have no weight. You will claim that he didn't dare return to get the pearls because he thought that he'd committed a murder. By this fiction you hope to shake my hold on you, but it won't work, Harris. I have direct proof as to this crime. My case against your men is absolutely complete. Let me add that I am not open to any bargains. I have determined, at all costs, to smash this nest of criminals; and I am going to do it."

He took a document from his pocket and laid it on Bill's desk.

"There's a copy of an affidavit from an eyewitness. Look it over, Harris, and see what you think of it."

The affidavit was a brief and accurate statement of the transfer of the candy box from Burgoyne's car to Gleason's cab. Bill gave it only a glance but he gathered the facts. He tapped the paper with an iron finger.

"This poor Swede ain't trustworthy," he said. "He don't look to be naturally bad but he's fallen for temptation. He stung me for five hundred, just to take a message to Mr. Burgoyne."

"Did you pay him?" Holy asked.

"Cash."

"Then you were bitten. I got no message."

"Surely you got one from me," said Mrs. Clarendon.

"No," Burgoyne replied. "I've had none at all.

In fact, it's been impossible to give me any. From Wednesday evening till this forenoon I have been a lunatic, except for the briefest intervals of partial sanity. It was because I wanted news so badly that I escaped as soon as I was clear enough in the head."

Bill addressed Mrs. Clarendon.

"What was the rate in your case?" he inquired.

"I gave Nielson two hundred dollars," she replied. "He came back and told me that Holy said that Anna had gone to the Pages', in Boston. Of course, Nielson knew of the Pages. It was easy enough for him to invent the story."

"He fed me with a yarn about Di Senti," said Bill. "Told me Burgoyne was takin' care of him. Threw me hard. I didn't see how he could know about that unless it was true."

"Blame me for that," said Mrs. Clarendon. "He got it out of me. I was very anxious, you understand, and I talked too much. But Nielson is certainly a marvel."

"This does not invalidate the man's testimony," said the lawyer. "Moreover, you already know the truth, Harris. Your man has confessed."

"He has not." The heavy tone shook Saintsbury's body if not his conviction. "Comin' back to Nielson," Bill proceeded. "He was raising money to get married."

"He told me that," Saintsbury snapped. "The young woman has nothing to do with this affair. She's respectably employed; a clerk in the Swedish consul's office."

"She's a manicure in a barber's shop," Bill said.

"Not but what there's many good girls in that line——"

Saintsbury didn't hear this. He himself was talking.

"Nielson has tried to sell his information. What of it? They all do it. He got very little money out of *me,* but I got the whole truth out of *him.*"

"How'd you get it?" Bill queried.

"How?" Saintsbury grinned. "I held over him what I hold over you, Harris, the terror of the law."

"Maybe we could do better in another way," Bill said. "We want to remember that this young man is far from home. He's got lost. Completely off the trail. Investigatin' him I find that before this brain-storm hit him he'd been above the average for honesty. I talked with a party from Sweden to-day. One that's known Nielson from a boy, and knows his family. The report was very good.

"Nielson, it's our business here to help men who've got into trouble, as you have. If there's any good in 'em. This institution goes right on doin' that, no matter what happens. Nothing can stop it because there's the right influence, the right man, behind it. That's Mr. Newcomb. I'll tell you about him, when there's time. Now if we could set you back where you begun to go wrong, would you want to do different?

"Don't answer too quick. You'd promise anything. But I'll tell you that it's likely there'll be no prosecution for what you've done. There ought to be, but I doubt that the complainants'll come for-

ward. Sit still and think about this, while I run over a few facts for Mr. Saintsbury's information."

Saintsbury had not attempted any interruption. He had watched Nielson, from the side of his eye, and had begun to see a new light; but he did not as yet see through the game of the iron-faced ex-burglar who had tricked him once before. In the back of his mind he was conscious of amusement, and even of admiration, at seeing Harris grimly go on with the work of reform, under such conditions. But the excellence of his adversary merely made the lawyer more determined to beat him; and to that end it seemed best to lie low, till he was sure of the reason why Pinney was absent from this scene. He had fairly well guessed the truth about it.

"The young woman in the case," Bill resumed, "is a Miss Engstrom. Her conduct in this matter has been bad, but there's things to say in her favor. She was anxious to get away from Broadway. Which indicates at least a leanin' toward a better life.

"She wanted to go back to Sweden, but also she wanted to make a show of success when she got there. She promised to marry Nielson if he'd raise a certain sum o' money. He got it, and turned it over to her. Then he insisted on their goin' to South America. He said he had a way to get rich down there. He didn't tell her how, but it's likely she suspected. Anyhow, she got scared; lost her head, and decided to run. With the money.

"Nielson, what you really had, to trade on in South America, was the Burgoyne pearls. Is that right?"

"Yes, sir." Nielson had covered his face. He spoke through his fingers.

Bill waited for Saintsbury to speak, but the lawyer remained silent, biding his time.

"Chauffeurs get pretty wise," Bill said, "and I've yet to see one that had anything on this boy. He knew all about the pearls, and the candy box. He took Miss Holden to Seitz's, Wednesday forenoon, and he saw that she didn't get the goods. He learned that Mr. Burgoyne was going to try, later in the day.

"Bear in mind that at that time Nielson had no hopes of Miss Engstrom. He couldn't get a haul of money honestly, and he didn't know any other way. He was near crazy. Here was riches that would get him all he wanted. So he thought, but now he knows different.

"He fell for it. On a chance that he might be left alone with that candy box he collected some old tools to weight it. He had 'em with him when he drove Mr. Burgoyne to Seitz's, Wednesday afternoon. Then Mr. Burgoyne met Mr. Pinney, and things broke very easy. Where did you turn the trick, Nielson? Was it done when Mr. Burgoyne and Mr. Pinney went into the Hotel Astor?"

"Yes, sir."

"You took out the pearls and put in the junk. Under your seat was a travelin' bag, and in the bag was a pasteboard box. About the size o' this one," Bill tapped the package on the desk, "but not suitable for an exchange. In the box that you had was a few toilet-table articles which you'd bought as a

present for Miss Engstrom. Costin' twenty-six dollars. You took out those things and put the pearls in the box; and the box into the bag.

"When Mr. Burgoyne and Mr. Pinney stopped on Fifty-fifth Street you checked the bag in the St. Regis. It stayed there till this forenoon when you got it out, and fastened it with screws so that it couldn't be opened. Toward noon you went to Miss Engstrom's, in Mr. Burgoyne's car, with the bag aboard. You'd made arrangements to go somewhere and be married, hadn't you?"

"Yes, sir." Boyish tears were trickling through Nielson's fingers.

"She'd gone away," Bill said, "leavin' a trick note that might have held Nielson for hours. But he's got good brains . In the course of not more than half an hour he figured the thing out. He knew she was going to Sweden, alone. He went to the Swedish line pier, and found out what had happened, without givin' himself away. I'd had Miss Engstrom taken off the ship, very quietly, and she's detained at Headquarters. Nielson's pocketbook was recovered. The money he wrongfully collected will be refunded to all parties that contributed; and no questions asked."

Bill gave the tenth part of one eye to Gleason who understood that Pinney's check transaction had been discovered—and forgiven. All might have been well, if Pinney had played straight.

Saintsbury had now got all he wanted in the way of evidence. The lapse of time had settled all questions as to Pinney. In spite of Bill's iron persistence Saintsbury knew that he had been watching the

half open door, and that he now understood the situation. It was obvious that he had felt no uneasiness at first, thinking it impossible for Pinney to get out of the offices and not dreaming that he would try. But it had begun to be apparent that he had more than tried; he had succeeded.

The lawyer rose and pointed his finger at Harris.

"You claim that the pearls are in Nielson's bag. Where is the bag, Harris?"

Gleason had been waiting for this question, in one form or another, for endless minutes and in complete despair. His right hand was behind him now, touching a pistol in his pocket. He was through.

"Mr. Pinney's got the bag," Bill said. "Bring it in, Jack, if you please."

The heart jumped out of Gleason's body, but he remained aware of what was taking place. Pinney passed him, carrying the bag which he set on Bill's desk. His face was colorless; he looked like a dead man. He retained his conjuring skill, however, and he *seemed* to slash the side of the bag with a knife that was ready in his hand. No eye except Bill's was sharp enough to see that the bag had been cut open before, and that the knife merely passed along a slit already made. But Gleason knew it, although he couldn't see it.

Bill put his hand into the bag and pulled out a pasteboard box, Saintsbury, Burgoyne and Mrs. Clarendon were now standing close to the desk. Bill lifted the cover of the box and disclosed a thick volume bound in brown leather, with lettering of faded gold.

"The Bible!" Mrs. Clarendon gasped.

Saintsbury snorted like a horse.

"This will hardly serve as a substitute for the Burgoyne pearls, Harris," he said.

"I neglected to tell you," Bill responded, "that I opened that bag, this forenoon, while Nielson was in Miss Engstrom's house; and a fierce job I had to get those screws out and put them in again. There's a second-hand bookstore on the corner, and I got a weight for the box. One that could do some good, if a man gone wrong should come on it sudden, as Nielson might."

Saintsbury sawed the air.

"I demand the pearls. There's no truce now, Harris. It's long since ended."

"The pearls," Bill said, "belong to Miss Holden. Jack, will you ask her to be kind enough to join us."

Pinney staggered to the door and opened it. As the girl entered, Bill took the Burgoyne pearls, in three separate parcels, from three different pockets, and carrying them as if they were three pet kittens he placed them in Anna's hands. She raised them toward her lips; then gave them to Cousin Holy.

Saintsbury had tried to intervene, but Mrs. Clarendon had deftly blocked him off.

"I demand——" he began; but the clear voice of Pussyfoot was already announcing:

"The State comptroller wishes to see Mr. Harris."

Mrs. Clarendon had now grasped both of Bill's hands. He took the time from her wrist watch.

"The comptroller's late," he said. "Show him in."

Pinney was standing on the threshold of his room,

clinging to the doorframe. Mrs. Clarendon saw him, and she let Bill go.

"Don't worry, Jack. It's all right now. How far'd you get?"

"Into somebody's office." Pinney made a feeble gesture toward the other end of the building. "Then I took stock of what I had. O-o-o-h Lord!"

"Well, it's good you came back."

"Back to the fold, Bill, and as Frank says, tamed. That last bump did the business. I'm not converted; not reformed. That's emotional stuff. I'm logically convinced. I know now that a man—no matter how he goes—gets nothing but his luck. He might as well go straight."

Bill turned to say a word to Gleason but the blond beauty had passed into oblivion. His yellow head was lying against the tall back of the chair, and he was like a tired child asleep. From the combined effects of the excitement and the drug he had fainted.

"I'll take care of him," Pinney said. "He's coming round. His eyes are now open."

"I hope so," Bill said.

Pussyfoot was ushering in the comptroller who hesitated at sight of so many people.

"Come in, sir," Bill invited him. "I'm prepared to make my report to you as to the Burgoyne pearls."

THE END

June 1

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